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**DEMYSTIFYING A SEXUAL PERVERSION:
An Existential Reading of Sadomasochism and Erich Fromm's Call to Love**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
Department of Psychology of
Duquesne University
for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical Psychology

by

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DEMYSTIFYING A SEXUAL PERVERSION: An Existential Reading of Sadomasochism and Erich Fromm's Call to Love

Introduction

The history of sadomasochism is an elusive and complicated narrative that involves more than the discovery and classification of a sexual transgression. A complete examination of this concept would involve a review of psychiatry, philosophy, psychoanalysis, anthropology, psychology, pornographic literary fiction, autobiographies, art, theology, ethics, and film. Such an exhaustive survey of sadomasochism however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation, which will remain within the purview of psychology. At the same time, I will draw from other disciplines in order to help clarify some of the problems that have interfered with a full understanding of sadomasochism as a psychological disorder.

The controversy and confusion surrounding sadomasochism began when sadism and masochism were first classified as two separate sexual perversions by Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965). He separated sexual sadism and sexual masochism according to the "intercourse of the sexes [where] the active or aggressive *rôle* belongs to man; [and the] woman remains passive" (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. 56). According to Krafft-Ebing, sadism was "the experience of sexual pleasurable sensations (including orgasm) produced by acts of cruelty, bodily punishment afflicted on one's own person or when witnessed in others, be they animals or human beings" (p. 53). Masochism was considered as the feminine "counterpart of sadism" (p. 34) by Krafft-Ebing. He defined it as "a

peculiar perversion of the psychical sexual life in which the individual affected, in sexual feeling and thought, is controlled by the idea of being completely and unconditionally subject to the will of a person of the opposite sex" (p. 86). It was Krafft-Ebing who first coupled sadism and masochism as "perfect counterparts" (p. 140), though he never used the term "sodomasochism" when describing their relationship and viewed them as opposites. The actual first usage of the term "sado-masochism" is unclear. One source makes reference to the term being coined in 1922 to explain the derivation of pleasure from the infliction of physical or mental pain on others or oneself ("Sadomasochism," 2006, p. 1).¹

Nevertheless, while Krafft-Ebing viewed sadism and masochism as separate entities, he reported numerous cases where instances of both could be found in the same individual. In every case however, he maintained that one of the two perversions always dominated and admitted he was unable to explain their simultaneous occurrence in the same person (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. 142).

Havelock Ellis (1903/1936) was the first to declare that elements of sadism and masochism should not "be regarded as opposed manifestations" (chap. 3, p. 119). He viewed sadism and masochism as interchangeable components of the same psychological entity and argued to abolish their distinction (Robinson, 1976, p. 24). Moreover, Ellis downplayed the differences between active and passive roles according to gender and posited that sadism and masochism are always present in the same individual, and should therefore be seen as complementary states. It was Ellis's assumption that the sadomasochist is an

¹ Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) report that the term "sadomasochism" is used in sexology to highlight the interplay between the intersubjective conflict of domination and submission with the intrapsychic conflict of self-punishment (p. 401)

individual with an abnormally low supply of sexual energy who requires the energies of fear or anger to become sexually aroused (p. 24).

Freud (1905/1957d) followed Ellis's lead by treating sadism and masochism as two faces of a single perversion that "are habitually found to occur together in the same individual" (p. 159). At the same time, he depicted the entity in active and passive forms similar to the binary conceptualization established by Krafft-Ebing. Freud was the first to conceive sadomasochism as part of normal character development instead of merely as a sexual perversion. Freud spent two decades reworking a theory that privileged sadistic aggression (sexual and non-sexual) as the primary drives that determine sadomasochism in the personality. He later reversed his position and subordinated sadism to a secondary process of masochism based on his formulation of the death instinct (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 157-170). At this point, before continuing with the history of sadomasochism theories that followed Freud, I will pause briefly to discuss how I examined the theories of Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Freud.

Daniel Burston (personal communication, March 10, 2006) has suggested that the late seventeenth-century abandonment of Aristotelian² scientific methods and procedures for Galilean³ approaches resulted in a corresponding shift from pre-

²Aristotelian physics uses normative concepts taken from ethics, which combined valiative and non-valiative ideas. For example, the heavenly movements of the stars represented the "highest" form of "good" and a striving towards perfection. On the other side, the "earthly" sub-lunar motion of inferior bodies was associated with "disturbances" and the forces of evil. This has been referred to as an *anthropomorphic* and *inexact* concept of "heavenly" and "earthly" and it foreshadowed the notions of "normal" and "pathological" in late nineteenth-century psychopathology, a conceptualization that has played a significant role in shaping scientific ideals within the field of psychology (Lewin, 1931/1999, p. 38).

³ The Galilean model of quantitative physics takes a homogeneous view of the physical universe. It views the movements of the stars and the physical world to be governed by the same laws of pure mathematics. What can be called a "post-Galilean" model refers to the empirical

modern to modern conceptualizations of sex and sexuality -- a shift that culminated in the late nineteenth century during the Victorian era, the period during which the concepts of sadism and masochism were born. Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Freud were all, to varying degrees, products of these changing times in scientific attitudes. The Aristotelian notion of the bodily passions adopted a primarily moralistic view of "natural law" whose function was mainly to instruct individuals on how to embrace good and avoid evil. "Sin" represented a deviation from the natural law, which was coterminous with Aristotelian standards. There was little attempt to develop a purely descriptive or theoretical account of the passions or of sexual desire because it seldom occurred to medieval minds that this might be useful. Forms of sexual conduct were deemed either "natural" or "unnatural", and these words were synonyms for "good" and "bad", respectively.

In the late 1880s, a more modern attitude toward sex had begun to develop as a rebellion against the late nineteenth-century mentality referred to as Victorianism.⁴ As the newer scientific frameworks began to supplant the prescriptive assumptions of premodern models, an epistemic shift was also taking place in the disciplines of medicine, psychiatry, and in the social sciences,

approaches of scientific psychology which gained ascendancy in the twentieth century. "Serialization" is a good example of a post-Galilean concept used by Freud. Serialization collapses the boundaries between the "normal" and the "pathological" in Freud's psychosexual theory of development because it implies a process of continuous variation that views transition stages as always present (Lewin, 1931/1999, p. 52). Freud's serialized approach to psychosexual development replaced Krafft-Ebing's (1886/1965) Aristotelian model based on a decadent nervous system (see pp. 3-4).

⁴ Victorianism can best be summarized as a series of movements for moral, social, and educational reform that emerged as a reaction to the growing dissolution of mores in English society that followed the French Revolution (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 257). It is important to note that Victorianism was not nearly as monolithic or as repressive as is commonly imagined.

including the newly emerging field of psychology. These changing methods were reflected in the work of the first sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Freud, who were analyzing sexuality from a naturalistic psychological point of view.⁵ In essence, the first sexologists replaced the concept of “sin” with the naturalistic concept of “psychopathology.” These early theories tended to use descriptive, quantitative measurements that aspired to be “value free” and anti-speculative -- that is, based on “fact” and not philosophical reflection. The concept of normality in these modern theories was idealized as a purely objective reality, yet normality also underwrote the assumption that corrective action was needed to address any kind of deviation from the norm. This therapeutic ideology was buttressed by the authority of biologists and physicians, who extended their reach into the realms of philosophy and psychology (Canguilhem, 1989, p. 43).

However desirable a naturalistic, that is, purely objective account of sexual passion may have been, this pursuit was in the end fraught with difficulties and ideological biases. In retrospect, it has become clear that the normative judgments and teleological assumptions embedded in the first modern theories of psychopathology, were often unbeknownst to the theorists themselves. For example, Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) viewed any sexual behavior that did not aim at procreation to be “tainted with antipathic sexual instinct” and derived from a “hereditary degenerate condition” (p. 187). A closer contemporary inspection of

⁵The naturalistic scientific view of sex and the rest of human passions rested on the idea that nature is basically physical and that the realm of the spirit or “soul” -- love, knowing, valuing, and judging -- are causally based upon corporeal processes (Stumpf, 1983, p. 453). Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) modified this view to a hierarchical perspective by privileging the “sexual feeling” over all other passions including love, ethics, aesthetics, and religion (see p. 1). The psychophysical term “drives” was substituted for passions by the early sexologists and is an important premise behind both Krafft-Ebing’s and Freud’s theories of sadomasochism. .

these supposedly "objective" theories and developmental norms reveal the moralistic underpinnings that masqueraded as disinterested clinical observation, theorization, and therapeutic intervention.

The belief, common among Victorian scientists, that philosophical reflection was antithetical to scientific practice (Canguilhem, 1989, p. 44) was another obstacle to a broad understanding of sadomasochism. It did not occur to most scientists that philosophical premises were embedded in their own methods of scientific inquiry. Many sexologists who claimed to be objective and therefore dismissive of philosophy were heavily influenced by philosophical assumptions that imposed limits on their findings. Krafft-Ebing's (1886/1965) approach to sadism and masochism is a prime example. He was critical of the philosophy of Schopenhauer and von Hartmann, who argued that sexuality takes a subordinate position to the passion of love. He called their philosophical perspectives "pessimistic" and "thoroughly incorrect and illogical, so far as science is concerned" (p. xxi). At the same time, his own theory of sadism and masochism, which was also referred to as degeneration theory took the position that all psychological manifestations of sexual behavior can be traced back to "their anatomical and physiological sources" (p. xxi). This idea, that all psychic phenomena have their roots in anatomy and physiology, comes from a German philosophical perspective known as mechanistic materialism (Fromm, 1969/1970, p. 46), which for sexologists like Krafft-Ebing was assumed to be a "lawful condition" (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. xxii). It did not occur to Krafft-Ebing that degeneration theory was a philosophical speculation rather than a fact or a law of

science. One may also critique Freud's theories of sadomasochism from the same perspective.

Returning to the history of sadomasochism theories, it was after Freud's primary masochism theory based on the death instinct when other theories of sadomasochism began to proliferate. The parameters of the sadomasochism discourse were extended from a restricted libidinal scope to a more generalized context of everyday social living (Horney, 1937; Sullivan, 1953), including the issues of race (Fanon, 1967), gender (Beauvoir, 1952; Butler, 1997), and institutional relations (Chancer, 1992). Nonetheless, with a few notable exceptions, the theoretical underpinnings of most modern and post-modern theories of sadomasochism have remained wedded to the themes of sexuality, gender, and aggression. This includes recent hermeneutic-phenomenological studies of sadomasochistic identities by Landridge and Butt (2004), and queer theories of subjection and power (Butler, 1992, 1997). This leads to my reasons for choosing to focus on the existential theories of Fromm and Sartre.

When the sadomasochism theories of Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1956) and Erich Fromm (1939, 1941, 1956) appeared, they were unlike other theories of sadomasochism during their era because neither approach posited sex as the primary locus of sadomasochism. Sartre and Fromm both rejected the natural scientific attitude towards the understanding of the human passions, such as the corporeal striving for love and the need for erotic pleasure. Instead, each appropriated an understanding of the passions that focused on interactions between a self and another person. Each existential thinker also shared the

belief that the striving for dominance and submission extends beyond the presumably drive-based sexual sphere as well. However, Fromm and Sartre did more than dethrone sexuality as the primary drive behind sadomasochism; they also opposed the medieval concept of "sin" and the "spirit of seriousness"⁶ which, I will argue, ran through most theoretical accounts of sadomasochism—including Freud's. Moreover, Sartre and Fromm both rejected the tendency to base modern dualistic standards of normality and pathology on psycho-neurotic concepts. During a time when most theorists used an intrapsychic model that reduced sadomasochism to an individual pathology based on a set of unconscious drives independent from external influences, Fromm and Sartre took the position that sadomasochism needs to be understood as taking place between human beings, who are interactively engaged with each other in a particular socio-historical context. Alongside their assumption of the primacy of human sociality in their approaches, Fromm and Sartre also stressed a notion of subjectivity that conveys an active sense of agency and the ability to make choices that impact others as well. Clearly, Fromm and Sartre viewed sadomasochism as more than a pathology confined to psychoneurotic parameters. One can see how both existential thinkers viewed sadomasochism as a primarily social, pervasive, and surprisingly "ordinary" human tendency that takes place within multiple human contexts.

⁶ Sartre (1943/1956) coined the term "spirit of seriousness" (*l'esprit de sérieux*) to describe any perspective that views man as an object and subordinates him to the world. In the spirit of seriousness, values are considered as having an absolute existence independent of human reality (p. 806)

Following an examination and comparison of Fromm's, Sartre's, and various post-Sartrean theories of sadomasochism, I will argue that Erich Fromm's theory of love, which he first proposed as an alternative to what he referred to as sadomasochistic pseudo-love in "Selfishness and Self-Love" (Fromm, 1939, pp. 507-523) is a highly suitable theoretical framework for the understanding of sadomasochism that bridges an important gap between existentialist and psychoanalytic thought. Fromm drew a clear distinction between productive love based on freedom that is able to overcome separateness and sadomasochistic pseudo-love, which is borne out of desperation and seeks to escape separateness and form attachments based on the need to avoid anxiety. I will argue that Fromm's (1939, 1941, 1956) differentiation of productive love from sadomasochistic pseudo-love effectively displaced sexuality as the primary cause of sadomasochism in a transformative way. A central theme of this dissertation is that Fromm's theory of love, which emphasizes the importance of strong, individuated, and mutually reciprocal relationships, is the best deterrent to sadomasochistic attachments. I further contend that Fromm's theory of love and sadomasochistic pseudo-love has gone underappreciated in the history of psychology in general, and continues to be overlooked in the current mind-set of sadomasochism theorists in particular.

Given that this dissertation is theoretical by design its methodology is organized around a systematic process of argumentation, that is, around the critical analysis of key texts addressing the topic of sadomasochism. To organize my analysis, I evaluate the theories of sadomasochism discussed in

light of four guiding criteria: internal consistency; how each theory is in dialogue with findings from other disciplines; the presence or absence of prescriptive norms; and the economy of a theorist's framework that may explain different expressions of sadomasochism. While some of these points are explicitly identified with certain theories others are implicit to my analysis throughout the text.

First, I am concerned with the degree of internal consistency between a theorist's conceptual framework of sadism and masochism and his or her own espoused ideals. For example, as I show in chapter 2, in "Instincts and Vicissitudes" (Freud, 1915/1962g, pp. 109-140), Freud espoused a method that stressed a strict and detached empirical attitude towards "the facts," which were to be examined in light of "the scientific concepts underlying [them]" (p. 109). For the most part, he contrasted this loosely empirical approach with that of speculation and philosophical reflection, "to the latter's discredit" (Holt, 1989, p. 48; see also Roazen, 2001, p. 83). Instead, Freud preferred making comparisons to the "science of physics" (Freud, 1915/1962g, p. 110) to explain how he developed his psychoanalytic concepts. Freud believed that all psychic phenomena have their roots in physiological processes, a speculative notion based on the philosophy of mechanistic materialism (Fromm, 1969, p. 46). Many of his most popular and influential theories fail to meet the criteria consistent with the empirical standards for physiological science that were prevalent during his era (Lewin, 1937/1999, p. 67). In fact, it is recognized by some that

psychoanalysis is more of an anthropological philosophical system than it is “an empirical discipline” (Holt, 1989, p. 365; also, see Lewin, 1937/1999, pp. 67-74).

A second criterion I employ is whether or not a given theorist has incorporated other findings, conceptualizations, criticisms, and contemporaneous findings from other disciplines. An example is how Krafft-Ebing incorporated the literature of Sade and Masoch to help him formulate his theory of sadism and masochism. At the same time, he downplayed how philosophical speculation might be useful to help him understand his new diagnostic framework for sadism and masochism. Another example, as noted by Havelock Ellis (1903/1936), was how Krafft-Ebing overlooked extant evidence of sadistic behavior in normal female sex play, which, according to Ellis, “occurs through a large part of nature” (p. 128). Krafft-Ebing mainly emphasized the hypersexual behavior of men, which he attributed to “the natural shyness and modesty of women towards the aggressive manners of the male” (1886/1965, pp.53-54). One could conclude based on Krafft-Ebing’s statements and conclusions that he was either unaware of or ruled out other findings which did not support his claim of a binary equation between male/sadism and female/masochism.

This leads to my third criterion, which is to critique the prescriptive norms that may be embedded in a specific theorist’s framework. Staying with Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) for the moment, I argue that one of his major problems was his presentation of heterosexual intercourse as the “gold standard” for his construction of sadism and masochism (p. 56). Granted, he presented this standard of sexual behavior during the Victorian era. Nonetheless, despite how

current critiques have debunked the idea of gendered polarities as intrinsic to sadomasochism, the popular imagination of sadomasochism as a gendered sexual perversion has yet to be dismantled. Krafft-Ebing's heteronormative account of sadism and masochism engendered a biological literalism that despite a lack of support from clinical evidence became etched in the minds of most sexologists' theoretical framework of sadomasochism that persists in many guises to this day.

The last criterion concerning my analysis of theories of sadomasochism draws from the principle known as "Ockham's Razor." Ockham's razor may also be referred to as the "law of parsimony." It suggests that "what can be explained on fewer principles is explained needlessly by more" (Stumpf, 1983, p. 191) and therefore, according to Ockham's law, a theory which demonstrates integrity of premise and elaboration is preferable to one that requires excessive reformulation or addenda. For example, as I recount in chapter 2, Freud frequently revised his theory of sadomasochism. He first switched from a mechanistic model based on physics to a psychological theory based on his Oedipal schema. When his findings did not support the Oedipal theory the way he hoped, he shifted once again to a biologically minded theory of sadomasochism which rested on the death instinct. A major tendency in Freud's theories, which could be considered a flaw, was how he continually deferred unresolved problems, such as the relationship between aggression, sexuality, and death to new theoretical schemas. At the same time, he was the first to notice that in certain instances, such as, mourning, melancholia, (Freud,

1915/1962h, p. 251) and moral masochism (Freud, 1924/1962e, p. 162) the explanation of sadomasochistic enactments could not be restricted to one or two simple drives. One can argue then, that Freud's theories of sadomasochism were lacking in an economy of vision and required an exorbitant amount of revisions.

Erich Fromm's theory of love on the other hand, provides a theoretical framework from which the understanding of sadomasochistic relationships can make sense and stand on its own without reformulation. Fromm's emphasis on the formation of individuated and mutually reciprocal relationships serves as a counterpoint to sadomasochistic pseudo-love and allows for instances of sexual, non-sexual, interpersonal, and group sadomasochism to be conceptualized under one integrated, theoretical premise: the inability to face existential aloneness and successfully resolve the need for relatedness with others. While there is clearly no perfect or universal theory of sadomasochism, I will argue that Fromm's conceptualization of love and pseudo-love demonstrates Ockham's notion of integrity of premise and elaboration and is an effective theoretical framework of sadomasochism.

In order to set the groundwork for the claims I make in this study, it is necessary, as was indicated earlier, to consider how theories of sadomasochism became "dominated" by sexual themes. Therefore, this dissertation is presented in two parts. In Part 1, which includes chapters 1 through 3, I will be examining the emergence of the modern scientific theories of sadomasochism with an analysis of each theorist's assumptions regarding sexuality and human behavior.

In Part 2, which covers the last two chapters; I will examine the contributions of those existential theorists who de-centered sexuality as the primary impulse behind sadomasochism.

In chapter 1, I examine Krafft-Ebing's formulations of sadism and masochism which reveal a succession of important biases that became etched in the minds of the sexologists that followed him. One of Krafft-Ebing's biases was his conflation of male biology with sadistic aggression and female biology with masochistic passivity. Another misleading association was his notion that the level of male sexual potency, judged by the male's ability to perform heterosexual intercourse, is equivalent to male sadistic behavior. Conversely, Krafft-Ebing viewed male sexual impotence (i.e. the inability to perform heterosexual intercourse) as a predisposing factor in masochism (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. 87), which he explained as a characterological defect based on the "natural" subordinating tendencies inherent to female physiology (p. 141). In both cases, he presented these misleading associations as if they were the fruits of disinterested observation rather than the re-inscription of long-established prescriptive norms.

In chapter 2, I will examine Freud's theories of sadomasochism. Alongside of his reputation as the most famous pioneer in the modern scientific approach towards sexuality (Lewin 1931/1999, p. 52), Freud is also regarded as the most prolific theorist on sadomasochism during his era. His theories can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, Freud assumed that sadism was primary and masochism secondary. In his second phase, Freud explained sadomasochism as being mediated by the Oedipal complex. In his third and final phase, which was

largely a reversal of the first phase, Freud asserted masochism to be the primary drive instead of sadism. Among Freud's papers on sadomasochism that are examined in this dissertation, there are two where he considers sadomasochism from a non-sexual perspective, which is crucial to my thesis. The first is "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1919/1962, pp.175-204), written during Freud's Oedipal-oriented phase and the second, "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 157-170), which signaled the beginning of Freud's final stage of theorizing on sadomasochism. I will argue that both of these papers open the door for a theory of sadomasochism that privileges the idea of human love and loving relationships to be the primary issue of concern regarding sadomasochistic behaviors rather than sexuality, aggression, or a death instinct. Nevertheless, despite these and other findings by Freud, he stayed with a theory that privileged the intra-psychic themes of sex, death, and aggression whenever explaining sadomasochism.

Whatever Freud's reasons were for proposing the death instinct in his last phase of theorizing on sadomasochism, it caused a stir in the psychoanalytic community. Although most analysts continued to follow the earlier Freud and maintained a natural scientific attitude towards sadomasochism, there were some notable exceptions. For instance, Karen Horney (1937) argued that female masochism was not biologically inevitable but, rather, was a social construction (Chancer, 1992, p. 114); Harry S. Sullivan (1953) used an interpersonal theory of anxiety to explain sadomasochism. The theories of Horney, Sullivan, and other post-Freudians will be explored in chapter 3.

In Part 2, I'll begin in chapter 4 with an examination of the influences on Fromm that led him to call for a theory of love and an analysis of the ways people avoid the given condition of existential aloneness. Instead of exploring the libido theory as the origin of sadomasochism, Fromm's (1939, 1941) concentrated on the patterns of "loving" relationships that individuals choose when overcoming feelings of separateness from one another as the mediating factor that explains sadomasochistic behavior. The turning point that led Fromm to call for a new vision of sadomasochism and a call for a theory of love anchored on his existential critique of Freud's primary masochism theory and the death instinct, which will be examined in Chapter 4. At the same time, Jean-Paul Sartre was examining sadomasochism from an existential-phenomenological perspective as will be noted in Chapter 4 as well.

In section A of chapter 5, I examine the existential foundations behind Fromm's theory of love and the mechanisms of escape which established a new way of conceptualizing sadomasochism. In section B, I examine Jean-Paul Sartre's (1943/1956) existential-phenomenological understanding of human relationships found in *Being and Nothingness* (Part III, chap. 1) which rests on the idea that sadomasochism is embedded in all human relationships. Sartre's ontological⁷ view is easy to overlook as a contribution to the understanding of the psychology of sadomasochism. This is followed in section C with a review of the contributions of various post-Sartrean analysts and thinkers who furthered the understanding of sadomasochism to different social and clinical contexts during

⁷Ontology refers to the description of being itself, "the conditions by which 'there is' a world, human reality, etc." (Sartre, 1943/1956, pp. 804-805)

the 20th century. Chapter 5 ends with a comparative analysis of Fromm's and Sartre's theories of sadomasochism that includes each existentialist's notion of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

In the conclusion, I will argue that based on a comparison of Fromm's conceptualization of love with that of Freud's and Sartre's views, Fromm's theory of love and his analysis of sadomasochistic pseudo-love offers a grounded and economical conceptual framework of sadomasochism that has been overlooked by current theorists of sadomasochism. Furthermore, I will contend, that based on current perspectives by sadomasochism theorists, without a theory of love that stresses strong salutary relationships as offered by Fromm, the understanding of sadomasochism will remain incomplete and open to the continued mistaken perception that sexuality is its pre-eminent cause. Reasons why Fromm's writings and theories continue to be overlooked in psychoanalytic and post-modern theories of sadomasochism will be explored and I will close by offering reasons why Fromm should be viewed as a major contributor to the history of sadomasochism theory.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

THE BIRTH OF THE SADOMASOCHISTIC COMPLEX

Section A: Richard von Krafft-Ebing's Publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis*

As mentioned in the introduction, the concepts of sadism and masochism were first introduced by the Austrian neuropsychiatrist, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, in his landmark textbook on sexually deviant behaviors called *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886/1965). Krafft-Ebing lists sadism and masochism as two distinct sexual perversions and named them after two famous authors. Sadism was “so named from the notorious *Marquis De Sade*, whose obscene novels . . . of lust and cruelty” (p. 417) detailed the complex interconnections between sex and power. Masochism, which Krafft-Ebing called “the opposite of sadism,” was named after Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, whose fiction described masochism as a “sexual anomaly . . . which up to his time was quite unknown in the scientific world as such” (pp. 86, 87).

Psychopathia Sexualis (1886/1965) was a popular success for Krafft-Ebing. The first publication of sexology research to reach a wider audience beyond the usual medical circles of late nineteenth-century Europe, it was published nearly two decades before Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/1957) and 11 years before Havelock Ellis's first volume of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897/1936). Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* has been compared to Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior and the Human Male* (as cited in

Robinson, 1976) for its scope and comprehensiveness; the difference between these two texts was that Krafft-Ebing intended *Psychopathia Sexualis* as a compendium for the diagnostic classification of sexual disorders, while Kinsey was interested in the acquisition of *normal* sexual behavior (Robinson, 1976, chap. 2).

Psychopathia Sexualis (1886/1965) provoked a considerable amount of professional interest and was a catalyst for a number of studies in the emerging field of sexology (Ellenberger, 1970). Nevertheless, Krafft-Ebing was spurned by his peers, for he financially profited from the sale of his textbook to the general public. Consequently, the popularity of this text called the professional seriousness of his work into question. The commercial success of *Psychopathia Sexualis* both reflected and fed into the growing popular interest in sexuality and its perversions. As Henri Ellenberger writes (1970):

It was . . . the time when popular books on sexual matters began to appear everywhere...The complaint against Krafft-Ebing was not in publishing his book, but that he had not prevented it from being sold indiscriminately. Benedikt [a Viennese physician] noticed that “today the students of higher schools for girls were more knowledgeable on the theme of sexual perversions than we were as young physicians”. . .

Obviously, the dividing line between scientific vulgarization and pornography was difficult to determine from the very beginning. (pp. 298-299)

This trend threatened the Victorian medical hierarchy, which viewed the proliferation of sexual knowledge among the general public as dangerous because such knowledge was sure to lead to a diminishing of their authoritative influence. The received view today in the United States is that Victorian Europe was sexually repressed and prudish. While a veneer of prudery characterizes that sociocultural moment, especially in the Anglo-Saxon orbit, it was not the same in continental Europe (Burston, 2005, personal communication). Sexual repression was less of a problem there than was the suppression of new findings concerning certain sexual practices by a medical establishment fearful of losing its authoritative power.

Foucault's (1978/1990) sociohistorical analysis of Victorianism suggests that the "deployments of power and knowledge of truth and pleasures" were more prominent than the practice of sexual repression, which "is not in any case fundamental or overriding" (p. 73). Foucault's analysis implies that the impact of a work like Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* helped to shape a new epistemological attitude towards "legitimate" sexual knowledge that would have served to legitimize the enjoyment of "proper" sexual relations.

One could argue that the multiple sets of conflicts which surrounded the surge of published material about sexual behavior in late nineteenth-century Europe would have heightened interest in sadism and masochism because it rendered alternate sexual practices more visible to public awareness than ever before. Sexology, at that time, frequently blurred the boundaries between, on the one hand, popular and literary discourses (e.g., novels and popular literature) and, on

the other hand, scientific discourse.⁸ In this light, the professional panic in the medical community over the popularization of sexology is understandable, as it threatened to undermine the credibility of the physician as the “sex expert” in popular consciousness.

Krafft-Ebing did not intend for his text to become public information (Blain, 1965, p. xvii). In fact, he had hoped it would become a reference for physicians and lawyers, and with each edition, he attempted to make the text more and more obscure to the public. Rather than directly appeal to the popular interest in sex, Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) was mainly concerned with identifying the organizing principles behind sexual perversions. He wrote:

It is not intended to build up in this book a system of the psychology of sexual life, [sic] still from the close study of psychopathology there arise most important psychological facts which it behooves the scientist to notice.

The object of this treatise is merely to record the various psychopathological manifestations of sexual life in and to reduce them to their lawful conditions. (pp. xxi-xxii)

Regardless of the author's intentions, *Psychopathia Sexualis* ultimately contributed to the breakdown of boundaries between the public and the

⁸Comparing a passage from Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1870/1971) with one of Krafft-Ebing's case reports demonstrates how blurred these boundaries were. For example, Krafft-Ebing's (1886/1965) description of “pageism” (p. 89) is depicted graphically and is hard to distinguish from the dialogue and behavioral descriptions that take place between Severin and Wanda in Masoch's *Venus in furs* (1870/1971, pp. 180-184).

Victorian medical professionals, with the result that Krafft-Ebing suffered a fall from grace among his peers.⁹

Section B: The Contributions and Limitations of Krafft-Ebing's Theories

Degeneration Theory and Male Heterosexism

Krafft-Ebing has been duly recognized as a pioneer in the field of sexual perversions (Blain, 1965, p. x). He raised significant questions about the nature of the sexual perversions while advancing the diagnostic classification of sexual disorders. At the same time, he seems to have recognized the broader implications of his work and urged restraint and scientific caution concerning his findings. In evaluating himself and his efforts to uncover the “lawful conditions” (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. xxii) of the sexual perversions he wrote that “the author is well aware of the fact that, despite his...far reaching experience in psychiatry and criminal medicine, he is yet unable to offer anything but an imperfect system” (p. xxii).

Krafft-Ebing's approach to theory emanated from the 19th century movement in psychiatry known as degeneration theory,¹⁰ which meant that he “was inclined to attribute most severe sexual perversions to a constitutional origin....[even though] the notion that psychological causes can be the origin of sexual perversions [had] gained ground” (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 299). It was a much

⁹ Krafft-Ebing went into professional hibernation shortly after the first edition of *Psychopathia Sexualis* was released, resigned his professorship at Strasbourg, and opened a sanitarium in Graz, Austria. For the next decade, he waited until the controversy abated and lived in relative peaceful seclusion while ministering to the insane. Eventually, he was re-instated as a university professor at Strasbourg and enjoyed a brief resurgence of credibility before his death in 1902 (Klaf, 1965, p. vi).

¹⁰ Degeneration theory is attributed to Benedikt Morel's theory of heredity which posits that mental illness is a symptom of a decaying central nervous system.

debated question during Krafft-Ebing's time as to whether sexual perversions were inborn or acquired, and psychological reasoning was very crude. In the following passage, one can detect a sense of moralism embedded in Krafft-Ebing's (1886/1965) explanation of the sexual perversions which was typical during his era:

Anomalies of the sexual functions are met with especially in civilized races. This fact is explained in part by the frequent abuse of the sexual organs and in part by the circumstance that such functional anomalies are chiefly the signs of an inherited disease condition of the central nervous system ("functional signs of degeneration"). (p. 32)

The consequences of Krafft-Ebing's conventional moralism was that at the same time that he was advancing scientific inquiry of the sexual perversions beyond morbid curiosity, Krafft-Ebing was also engaging in some mystifying speculations about the origin of sexual perversions that led to confusion rather than clarity. The tendency to skew empirical findings in sexology according to conventional moralism was emblematic of Krafft-Ebing's era and it went along with questionable professional claims and judgments.

A good example of conventional moralism in Krafft-Ebing's writings can be seen in how he causally linked homosexual acts ¹¹ with childhood masturbation (p. 188). Krafft-Ebing considered the general practice of masturbation as a "defect [which] influences the morals, the character, fancy, feeling and instinct

¹¹ Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) distinguished between learned homosexual behavior as a perversity he called a "vice" (p. 53) and homosexuality as a perversion, or a *parasthesia*, which he linked with a cerebral neuroses that was indicative of a diseased central nervous system (chap. IV).

of the youthful masturbator, male or female, in an unfavorable manner, even causing...the desire for the opposite sex to sink to *nil*” (p. 189). Based on his explanation for homosexuality and masturbation, one can surmise that for Krafft-Ebing, degeneration theory did more than uncover the “important psychological facts” (p. xxi) of sexual anomalies. It perpetuated, under the guise of scientific reasoning, the prescriptive notion that only heterosexual intercourse performed for the purposes of procreation is “normal,” while any sexual behavior which varies from this standard is to be suspiciously viewed and considered deviant in pathological terms. To be sure, this was a heteronormative ideal that was scientifically rationalized as a “lawful condition” (p. xxii) and it suffused Krafft-Ebing’s entire text, including his explanations of homosexuality and masturbation just as it did for his explanations of sadism and masochism.¹²

Krafft-Ebing’s Definition of Sadism: A Moralistic Biologism

Krafft-Ebing’s (1886/1965) first definition for sadism was stated as “the association of lust with cruelty, which is indicated in the physiological consciousness. [It] becomes strongly marked on a psychically degenerated basis, and . . . this lustful impulse coupled with presentations of cruelty rises to the height of powerful affects” (p. 34). He followed this statement with the added qualifier that the level of sadistic cruelty is correlated with sexual potency of the “tainted individual” (p. 34). According to Krafft-Ebing, the intention of the sadist --who is

¹² Havelock Ellis (1897) advanced a congenital theory of homosexuality which was non-pathological and embraced compassionate tolerance (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 778). This is correlated with Ellis’ compassionate and non-pathological stance on sadism and masochism as well (see section D of this chapter).

unmistakably assumed to be a male in all of his examples -- derives from enactments of sexual cruelty that are assumed to be a direct consequence of sexual urges that are unable to be satiated through the act of heterosexual intercourse. As he explained:

If potent, the impulse of the sadist is directed to coitus, coupled with preparatory, concomitant or consecutive maltreatment, even murder of the consort (*"Lust Murder"*), the latter occurring chiefly because sensual lust has not been satisfied with the consummated coitus. (pp. 34-35)

One might raise a question about Krafft-Ebing's implied assumption in the above passage that establishes the heterosexual male sex drive as the only moderating variable behind lust murders. Nevertheless, it is exactly what Krafft-Ebing assumed: all acts of violence which precede and follow the act of heterosexual intercourse are the exclusive function of the (male) sadist's sex drive. Moreover, he equated psychic expressions of sadism with physiological impairment as seen in the following passage:

If the sadist is psychically or spinally impotent, as an equivalent of coitus, there will be noticed strangling, stabbing, flagellating (of women), or under circumstances ridiculously silly and mean, acts of violence on the other person (*symbolic sadism*), or also for want of something better on any living and feeling object (whipping of school children, recruits, apprentices, cruel acts on animals, etc.). (p. 35)

The previous two passages suggest that Krafft-Ebing posited the idea that male sexual potency is equivalent with sadistic behavior. As part of this conflation, he

further implies that the male sex drive is a quantifiable entity which can be measured and correlated with acts of violence and cruelty. From an empirical scientific standpoint, there has never been any evidence to suggest that what Krafft-Ebing claimed about the male sex drive was accurate. Yet, the conflation between sexual potency and aggression was presented as a value free fact that became a law in the early days of psychopathology (see Canguilhem, 1989, pp. 56-57).

The quantification model of the sexual libido as espoused by Krafft-Ebing conveys the conventional hetero-normative values emblematic of Krafft-Ebing's time. The converse of the male potency/sadism conflation is the impotent male/masochist idea which Krafft-Ebing also unwisely advocated. It is a distinctive feature of late 19th century theories of psychopathology that the ideas of "normal" and "pathological" were imbued with semi-quantitative concepts, and that these concepts tended to justify preconceived notions about what is "right and wrong" rather than merely describe behavior.¹³ At the root of both claims was the idea that heterosexual intercourse enacted for the purpose of procreation is the golden standard that determines healthy sexual behavior. In hindsight, Krafft-Ebing, and other early sexologists were far more prescriptive than descriptive in their conclusions about sexual perversions in general and sadism and masochism in particular. In effect, Krafft-Ebing was implying that it was a "sin" to express intense sexual desire because it leads to evil acts of sadism.

¹³ Canguilhem (1989) points out that the same scientific dogma which governed the idea of the normal and the pathological in the fields of biology and medicine during the late 19th century found its way into psychology and psychopathology as well (p. 42). This dogma was based on the twofold premise that the "normal" could be defined in purely objective terms and that it could be expressed quantitatively (p. 57).

Conversely, male masochism is an evil derived from a *diminished* sexual libido that is due to a “hereditarily tainted individuality” (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. 87) that is characteristic of the biological constitution of women (p. 141). Besides the moralism embedded in Krafft-Ebing’s claim that male sexual potency was the “lawful condition” (p. xiv) governing sadism and masochism, there was also a lack of economical clarity in his theoretical framework that could explain the presence of sadism and masochism in the same individual.¹⁴ Because he privileged heterosexual intercourse as the only standard to contrast sadism and masochism as perversions, there were many instances of sadomasochism that Krafft-Ebing was forced to leave unexplained for those who followed him.

Consequences of Biologism for Theories of Sadism and Masochism

It is a curious irony that Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) was the first to call attention to the psychology involved in sadism and masochism, given that he claimed to have no interest in a psychological exploration of the “sexual life” (p. xxi). He remained convinced that sadism derived from an innate source of male sexual aggression that “can by no manner of means be attributable to external impressions, much less to sexual temper” (p. 54). According to Krafft-Ebing, sadism and masochism are pathological extensions of “normal” sexual teasing and “horseplay” between lovers (presumed to be heterosexual). He invoked the laws of physiology to back up his claim that it is normal for the male to be sadistic in sexual behavior. In addition, he advanced the idea that the most destructive acts of sadistic cruelty can be

¹⁴ As mentioned earlier, Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) admitted that the instances of sadism and masochism which occur simultaneously in the same person presented “some difficulties of explanation (p. 142).

traced back to “the sphere of physiological sexuality” (p. 53) which is part of the natural biological constitution of the male. Moreover, Krafft-Ebing declared that male sadistic aggression is actually nurtured by passive female compliance.¹⁵ It’s now apparent that if one is to take Krafft-Ebing’s argument seriously, then the most morbid and destructive forms of sadistic behavior are separated by incrementally increasing amounts of sexual passion. Simple reflection would seem to suggest otherwise however, as there is a world of difference between the intention to humiliate, subjugate and/or destroy another human being and being sexually passionate towards a lover or a stranger.

While one may object to Krafft-Ebing’s quantification of sexual aggression, perhaps the bigger problem was how male heteronormativity skewed his observations. For example, how far did anyone really have to go to observe that aggressive acts of biting and scratching were not specific only to the male in human sex play? Yet, Krafft-Ebing asserted that biting and scratching were exclusively male behaviors. Leaving European socio-sexual practices aside for the moment, anthropologists in the late nineteenth century had already noted tendencies of female human aggression and physical dexterity in the courtship rituals of New Zealanders, Eskimos, and other non-Western cultures (Ellis, 1903/1936, pp. 75-76). These extant findings suggest that Krafft-Ebing may have been unaware of studies from other fields that did

¹⁵ Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) wrote that “it seems probable that this sadistic force is developed by the natural shyness and modesty of woman towards the aggressive manners of the male, especially during the earlier periods of married life and particularly where the husband is hypersexual” (pp. 53-54).

not support his thesis or, perhaps less likely, he ignored them.¹⁶ The male Eurocentric attitude embedded in Krafft-Ebing's theorizations on sadomasochism has come to be referred to as "the patriarchal perversion" (Thompson, 1994, p. 20).¹⁷

It becomes evident that Krafft-Ebing's gendered and binaristic equation of sadism with male sexual aggression and masochism with female passivity was inconsistent with his own espoused ideal of value-free, empirical scientific inquiry. Moreover, as suggested earlier, his theorizations on sadism and masochism cannot be viewed as economical because they left too many instances of sadistic and masochistic behavior unexplainable. Added to these criticisms is that fact that Krafft-Ebing declared that he was uncovering the "psychological facts" of male aggression being intrinsic to sadism and female passivity as inborn to masochism while simultaneously disavowing any intention on his part to present a "system of the psychology of the sexual life" (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. xxi). Krafft-Ebing precluded any representation of male and female sexuality beyond the obligatory stereotypes of male aggression and female passivity as if they were a fixed reality. Unfortunately, these themes became attached as the prominent feature of the discourse of

¹⁶ Fifteen years after Krafft-Ebing concluded the male/female biological dichotomy for sadism and masochism, Havelock Ellis pointed out the flaw in Krafft-Ebing's theories for both. Ellis wrote that "Krafft-Ebing's methods are open to some objection. His mind is not of a severely critical order" (Blain, 1965, p. x). Ellis' arguments will be explored in more detail in the next section

¹⁷ A similar patriarchal bias is also evident in Freud's approach to sadomasochism as chapter 2 will show.

sadomasochism theory as most Victorian sexologists embraced Krafft-Ebing's theorizations about sadism and masochism.¹⁸

From Simple Algolagnia to Intentional Cruelty

It is a profitable irony for psychology that despite Krafft-Ebing's (1886/1965) dislike for psychological inquiry, he was the first to identify the psychology of domination and submission as the core themes propelling the sadomasochistic impulse. After establishing sadism as "the experience of sexual pleasurable experiences...produced by acts of cruelty...afflicted by one's own person or witnessed in others, be they animals or human beings" (p. 53), Krafft-Ebing added the following groundbreaking statement: "It may also consist of an innate desire to humiliate, hurt, wound, or even destroy others in order to thereby to create sexual pleasure in one's self" (p. 53). Prior to this statement by Krafft-Ebing, "active algolagnia," was the only term used to associate the infliction of pain with sexual arousal (p. 417). Krafft-Ebing's notation of the *intention of cruelty and the desire to exercise domination over another human being* marks the beginning of the history of the psychology of sadomasochism. Freud, too, recognized the importance of Krafft-Ebing's findings regarding intentional cruelty and the need to humiliate another person, and extended credit to Krafft-Ebing for doing so. Freud (1905/1957d) wrote:

The most common and the most significant of all the perversions — the desire to inflict pain upon the sexual object, and its reverse — received

¹⁸ Among the sexologists, Freud was primarily responsible for keeping alive Krafft-Ebing's heterosexual binarization ideal of sadomasochism by incorporating it into his Oedipal theory of psychosexual development. Freud's theories for sadomasochism will be examined in the next chapter.

from Krafft-Ebing the names of ‘sadism’ and ‘masochism’ for its active and passive forms respectively . . . This emphasizes the pleasure in *pain*, the cruelty; whereas the names chosen by Krafft-Ebing bring into prominence the pleasure in any form of humiliation or subjection. (p.157) ¹⁹

Section C: Krafft-Ebing’s Definition of Masochism

Krafft-Ebing did not hesitate in choosing the Marquis de Sade as the source and symbol for the term “sadism.” Sade had been dead for more than a half-century and was well known as the “notorious Marquis de Sade, after whom this combination of lust and cruelty has been named, [and who] was such a monster” (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. 69). Consequently, labeling sexual cruelty as sadism seemed logical to Krafft-Ebing. When he named masochism in memory of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, however, Krafft-Ebing seemed to feel obligated to justify his choice and defend his reasons for doing so.

Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was a popular German author during Krafft-Ebing’s time that was celebrated as a political essayist and is even considered to be an early feminist (Lotringer, 1989, p. vi). His most discussed novel, *Venus in Furs* (Sacher-Masoch, 1870/1971), is now accepted as the original literary reference for masochism. ²⁰ It is the story of a highly dramatic and proscribed

¹⁹Although he acknowledged his debt to Krafft-Ebing, Freud preferred a more unified theoretical stance that treated sadism and masochism as two faces of the same perversion (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, pp. 401-402). These and other differences between Freud and Krafft-Ebing will be discussed in chapter 2.

²⁰The events in the novel supposedly took place in real life between Masoch and Fanny Pistor, an aspiring writer who expressed an interest to be a protégé to Masoch. Eventually, Masoch convinced Pistor to meet with him and persuaded her to sign a written agreement to engage in a kind of “Pygmalion project wherein the woman is trained to become Masoch’s fantasy mistress while believing that she’s acting according to only her own desires” (Lotringer, 1989, p.

relationship between Severin von Kusiemski (Masoch's alter ego) Wanda von Dunajew (Pistor). (Masoch changed the characters names to protect the anonymity of the couple.) The novel, which is replete with scenes of torture and sexual debasement, was about a man who could only find pleasure by being tyrannized by a stronger superwoman figure (Lotringer, 1989, p. vii). Krafft-Ebing found Masoch's relationship with Pistor to be the perfect embodiment of sexual masochism.

Never before had a popular novel and its author been directly referenced in the psychiatric literature as *Venus in furs* and Masoch were by Krafft-Ebing. This signaled a new form of "scientific discovery," which Nick Mansfield (1997) refers to as "the modernity of masochism" (p. 2). Krafft-Ebing's reference to Masoch and *Venus in furs* in the naming of masochism as a clinical syndrome calls attention to the inherently porous nature of the boundaries between clinical psychiatry and creative fiction.²¹

Krafft-Ebing's naming of masochism is a pivotal historical event because "the condition [masochism] and the literature came into existence at the same moment" (Mansfield, 1997, p. 13). But, he was merely scratching the surface of a much broader pathological phenomenon. Masoch's literature was an ideal backdrop to Krafft-Ebing's investigation of the sexual perversions, and it fed the

ix). With Pistor's consent, Masoch carefully orchestrated the destruction of the boundaries between his real life and his "art" through acts of sexual slavery which he directed.

²¹ If more proof is needed on the similarities between scientific literature and the 19th century novel, the reader is urged to sample almost any passage between Severin and Wanda from *Venus in furs* and compare it with Freud's (1895/2000) case history of "Fräulein Anna O." (pp. 21-47) written about fifteen years later. There is a very thin line between the narrative "clinical" style of Freud and Masoch's novelistic narrative style. While these texts have different intentions and are pressed in the service of very different agendas, without a framing of their contexts, each text might be easily confused with the other. Determining that one is fiction while the other is non-fiction is not always as easy as it might seem.

cultural obsession with sex that galvanized further studies in sexology among Victorian medical experts. But while drawing attention to the master/slave dialectics of power in sexual relationships, at least implicitly, Krafft-Ebing was dismissive of any philosophical explanation of human passions such as the desire for power over others that could be a primary force behind sadomasochistic behavior. As stated earlier, Krafft-Ebing subordinated all drives to sex (see Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. xxi).

The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Classification of Masochism

Krafft-Ebing's definition of masochism does not associate physical pain with sexual stimulation, as is often imagined (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 298). He understood that it is the wish to suffer pain that is central to the masochistic syndrome. Perhaps, an even greater contribution to the understanding of masochistic phenomena was Krafft-Ebing's emphasis on the intention to be subjected to the human will of another person that is at the core of masochism. As he said, "the will of the ruling individual dominates that of the person in subjection, just as the master's does that of the bondsmen" (Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. 134). One finds in this description by Krafft-Ebing an absence of the conventional cultural bias that suffused his other descriptions of masochism and sadism. The use of the master-bondsman analogy enhances the understanding of sexual bondage.²²

²² It should be noted that Krafft-Ebing chose the term "ruling individual" and "person in subjection" over the favored expressions of "slave" and "master" in masochism because he wanted to differentiate sexual bondage from other aspects of masochism (see Krafft-Ebing, 1886/1965, p. 421).

Despite his claim that masochism was associated with a female biological constitution, Krafft-Ebing had to admit that men “almost exclusively [made] up the series of observed cases” (p. 134) which added confusion to his theory. His confusion stemmed from his attachment to the idea that masochism was somehow a function of male sexual potency and/or impotency. In those cases where the male masochist was able to perform intercourse, Krafft-Ebing suggested that a pathologically high sex drive (*hyperaesthesia*) was its cause. In other cases, where intercourse was not involved, he claimed that the lack of sexual potency was due to an inherited biological flaw (p. 87). One can see from these differing explanations that Krafft-Ebing employed the behavioral standard of heterosexual intercourse as the norm from which masochism was designated as a perversion.

Krafft-Ebing's theory of masochism and sadism emerged during an era of dramatic change in prevailing conventional attitudes towards sex and morality, but one recognizes bias and limitations which were surprisingly resistant to change at the same time. To make their theory “work” Krafft-Ebing (and other sexologists) ignored anthropological studies and clinical case material which refuted the “unthinking identification between masochistic passivity and the feminine” (Mansfield, 1997, p. xi). As a result, Krafft-Ebing's lasting contributions to the understanding of sadism and masochism came from those observations that were least clouded by the cultural predilection towards heteronormative ideals.

Krafft-Ebing's Attempt to Connect Sadism with Masochism

As mentioned previously, Krafft-Ebing viewed sadism and masochism as opposite pathologies and admitted to being confused whenever he observed cases of sexual sadism and sexual masochism in the same individual. He never used the term “sadomasochism,” which suggests that he never conceived sadism and masochism as a unitary phenomenon. At the same time, he did note that “the idea of subjection...both passively and actively, forms the nucleus of the desires” (p. 142), but he always insisted that one of the two perversions (sadism or masochism) was more dominant whenever such an instance occurred.

The influence of Aristotelian logic was employed by many Victorian sexologists and it is a factor that could help explain Krafft-Ebing's thinking on masochism and sadism (see Fromm, 1956, chap. 2).²³ Aristotelian logic, or the logic of contradiction, states that “A” (i.e., sadism) cannot be “A” and “non-A” (masochism) at the same time. Therefore, the possibility for sadism and masochism to be conceived as an inter-connected whole is precluded in Aristotelian logic. For Krafft-Ebing, whose scientific thought is based on the tradition of Aristotelian logic, masochism and sadism occurring simultaneously in the same person would have appeared illogical, if not impossible. The inability to conceptualize sadomasochism as a single phenomenon promoted the bifurcation of sadism and masochism into gendered opposites which

²³ Benjamin, (1988) uses the term Hegelian logic to depict the same thought processes in her criticism of Freud's theory of sadomasochism. Simply put, the Hegelian approach takes the position that “[o]pposites can no longer be integrated; one side is devalued, [and] the other idealized” (p. 50).

established a purely symbolic (rather than strictly empirical) equation between masculinity/aggression/sadism on the one hand and femininity/passiveness/masochism on the other. This bifurcation remains active to the present day in the popular imagination. Thus, Krafft-Ebing's text set the tone for a social construction of sadomasochism which precludes any further social, philosophical, and psychological speculation about sadism and masochism beyond and outside the sexual realm.²⁴

Section D: Havelock Ellis and the Modernist Perspective

Many historians of psychology continue to overlook Henry Havelock Ellis, the first major sexologist to follow Krafft-Ebing.²⁵ Ellis "contributed the most searching comments on Krafft-Ebing" (Blain, 1965, p. xviii) and championed the cause of the Victorian individual struggling with sexual problems in "an age too enlightened to believe in Christianity" (Calder-Marshall, 1959, p. 173). Ellis infused tolerance and a more liberal perspective towards sadomasochistic sexual practices while attempting to construct a systematic sexology of sadism and masochism (Robinson, 1976, p. 22).

Ellis viewed sex as the central problem of life and sought to dispel myths, puncture widely held prejudices, and provide as many answers as he possibly could to questions about sex. The most discernible themes and sentiments in his

²⁴ Freud continued the tradition of Krafft-Ebing by espousing a psychoanalytic theory of sadomasochism based on similar polarities which will be discussed in chapter 2.

²⁵ Ellis is historically situated as the first sexologist who focused on sadomasochism following Krafft-Ebing. He began writing on sexual issues in the early 1890's and was already in dialogue with Krafft-Ebing and other sexologists at that time (see Robinson, 1976; Grosskurth, 1980). Ellis' first works on sadomasochism preceded Freud's first writings on the same topic by about two years.

work were compassion and a “normalizing” attitude towards the sexual perversions which stressed the fundamental humanness rather than the oddness or depravity of his subjects. In addition to championing many individuals who were marginalized for their sexual tendencies during the Victorian era, Ellis was a tirelessly inquisitive empirical scientist with a high level of personal integrity. He was known as a sex counselor, who often refused payment for his services because he felt it was unethical to charge for helping others. Ellis was hailed in the English-speaking world as a sage on matters of sex and called “a healer possessed of rare powers” (Calder-Marshall, 1959, p. 173). Although untrained in psychiatry, he was a physician with a generalist background that included studies in theology, zoology and ethnography. “Ellis was the supreme type of Victorian amateur polymath trying to follow in the tradition of Darwin, Spencer, and Frazer, who confidently assumed that they could take all knowledge as their domain” (Grosskurth, 1980, p. 217). He was a true child of the Enlightenment, with a supreme faith in rationality, and viewed himself as a knowledgeable critic of science, literature, and the arts. Ellis believed that by studying what had already been done by others and then applying his own critical powers of rational thought, he could solve most of the mysteries of sex (Grosskurth, 1980, p. xvi).

Ellis wrote seven volumes called *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* between the years of 1897 and 1928 and aspired to develop a comprehensive theoretical system of sexual perversions. He completed the first six volumes by 1910 and waited nearly twenty years to complete his seventh and final volume, “Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies” (1928). His work is fragmentary and

sprawling however, as Ellis was more inquisitive than systematic. He did not actually build a theory that can be elaborated upon. Whereas Freud committed himself tenaciously to theory building, Ellis lacked theoretical focus and depth. His inquiries sometimes drifted into apologetics for the sexual perversions that he studied. Nevertheless, Ellis's examinations of others theories and his own formulations warrant serious attention.

An outstanding feature of Ellis's work was his refusal to endorse most of the Victorian era's restrictive norms regarding gender. Ellis conveyed a high regard for the dignity of those individuals labeled as "sexual perverts." An excellent example of Ellis's regard for his clients is found in "The History of Florrie and the Mechanism of Sexual Deviation" (Ellis, 1928, pp. 121-212) which is about a young woman with masochistic tendencies. Whenever possible, Ellis avoided the use of pathological language and terms. He believed that much of what was deemed "perverse behavior" had existed throughout all of human history and, for the most part, had few negative consequences for civilization. This was especially true of his view of homosexuality, which Ellis argued is more common among cultivated members of civilization than among those labeled as "degenerates."

*Ellis's Progressive Views of Sexuality*²⁶

Havelock Ellis forged a progressive sensibility that led to a greater tolerance of human sexuality in many realms. In "The Sexual Impulse in Women" (Ellis, 1903/1936, v.1, part 2), Ellis explored the female orgasm in both its psychological

²⁶ This section is presented in order to provide a background for Ellis's liberal views on sadomasochism during the era of Victorianism.

and physiological dimensions, asserting that female sexuality was a much more complex topic than his Victorian medical peers acknowledged. He investigated the importance of foreplay, cunnilingus and fellatio (which Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) condemned as an act associated with sexual impotence (p. 337), and coitus reservatus, the practice of the male holding back orgasm to stimulate repeated orgasms by the female (Ellis, 1936, p. 238).

While critical of Victorian hypocrisy concerning the sexual repression of women, Ellis did not completely abandon convention. He clung to the conventional idea that the male is the “natural” aggressor in sexual relations, though he did not depict sadistic aggression as a pathology that is restricted to the male. In fact, Ellis (1903/1936) noted that contrary to conventional notions, “normal sadism. . . occurs throughout a large part of nature [and] it is nearly always the male who is the victim to the female” (p. 128).²⁷ What was most fresh about Ellis’s writings during this era was how he was able to discuss the biological and cultural aspects of sex practices together (pp. 66-103).

On the topic of homosexuality, Ellis was particularly prescient. He was the first sexologist in the Victorian era to treat homosexuality “as neither a disease nor a crime” (Grosskurth, 1980, p.185). He was critical of exaggerated psychoanalytic claims to “cure” homosexuality through resolution of the Oedipus complex (Robinson, 1976, p. 5). On the basis of animal studies and his own 33 case studies of human “sexual inverts,” Ellis (1897/1936) argued that homosexuality has always existed throughout history and has advantages for civilization in the

²⁷ Ellis’s impressions of sadomasochism as it relates to women will be discussed later in this chapter.

areas of art and culture. He believed homosexuality to be congenital in nature but shunned Krafft-Ebing's characterization of the orientation as "degenerate" or "pathological." Ellis (1897/1936) also rejected Krafft-Ebing's notion that homosexual behavior was "a form of behavior willfully indulged out of boredom or sheer perversity" (Robinson, 1976, p. 5). Rather, he compared it to the medical condition of color-blindness and de-pathologized it as a psychiatric or psychological disorder.

Looking at Ellis's treatment of female sexuality and homosexuality, one is struck by his tolerance and a distinctive lack of judgmentalism that contrasts widely with the prescriptive approach of Krafft-Ebing and the ostensibly detached "neutrality" of Freud's psychoanalytic method.

Ellis's Differences from Krafft-Ebing

While Ellis (1903/1936) had a more liberal stance than Krafft-Ebing, he stayed within a biological framework and believed that both sadism and masochism are integral features of human sexual behavior. What distinguished Ellis's approach was that he believed sadism and masochism are better understood through illuminating the relationship between love (i.e., pleasure) and pain. His investigations of the mating behavior of animals and of primitive cultures were used to support his claims and build his theory. Ellis (1903/1936) wrote:

Among mammals the male wins the female very largely by the display of force. The infliction of pain must inevitably be a frequent indirect result of the exertion of power. It is even more than this; the infliction of pain by the male on the female may itself be a gratification of the impulse to exert

force. . . . Yet, the more carefully we study the essential elements of courtship, the clearer it becomes that, playful as these manifestations may seem on the surface, in every direction they are verging on pain. It is so among animals generally; it is so in man among savages. "It is precisely the alliance of pleasure and pain," wrote the physiologist Burdach, "which constitutes the voluptuous emotion." (p. 67)

As one can ascertain from the above passage, Ellis viewed the rituals of courtship and mating in animals to be similar to that of human beings. There is little hint of pathological foreboding in Ellis's analysis which contrasted sharply with Krafft-Ebing's focus on pathology with respect to sadistic and masochistic tendencies. Ellis (1903/1936) viewed human courtship behavior as a "refined and delicate form of combat" (p. 67) that brought along the experiences of love and pain. He declared that this process of "marriage by capture... is yet found in all but the highest and most artificial stages of human society" (p. 71). While one part of Ellis's conclusions about courtship seemed to bring him into agreement with Krafft-Ebing -- the contention that sadistic behavior is part of the normal sexual play of adults -- Ellis was nonetheless in disagreement with Krafft-Ebing's morbid pathological perspective and gendered equation that associated sadism solely with male sexual aggression. As far as Ellis (1903/1936) could see, there were plenty of instances of sadism in female sexual behavior. He wrote:

The female also in courtship delights to arouse to the highest degree in the male the desire for her favors and to withhold those favors from him, thus finding on her part also the enjoyment of power in cruelty. "One's cruelty is

one's power," Millament says in Congreve's *Way of the World*, "and when one parts with one's cruelty, one parts with one's power. (pp. 67-68)

These observations by Ellis directly refuted Krafft-Ebing's theory on sadism, which associated sadism with male sexual aggression. As noted in the above remarks by Ellis, the incidence of female sadism was actually higher than that of male sadism in courtship practices. According to Ellis's observations and his reading of other's research, it was quite common for a female to enjoy cruelty and punishment meted out by male suitors towards rival males.²⁸

When Ellis turned his attention to the literature of Sade, again one finds a different interpretation of sadism from Krafft-Ebing's standard reading of Sade that he interpreted as male biological aggression. Ellis (1903/1936) wrote:

It [sadism] is not, as we might infer, both from the definition usually given and from its probable biological heredity from primitive times, a perversion due to excessive masculinity. The strong man is more apt to be tender than cruel, or at all events knows how to restrain within bounds any impulse to cruelty; the most extreme and elaborate forms of sadism (putting aside such as are associated with a considerable degree of imbecility) are more apt to be allied with a somewhat feminine organization. . . . I have noted some of the feminine traits in De Sade's temperament and appearance. The same may often be noted in sadists whose crimes were very much more serious and brutal than those of De Sade. (p. 109)

²⁸ In order to illustrate how female sadism was just as typical as male sadism, Ellis (1936/1903) pointed out that "one of the most widespread of the occasional and non-essential manifestations of strong sexual emotion, especially in women, [is] the tendency to bite" (pp. 84-85).

One senses from the preceding passage how original Ellis's views of sadism and masochism were in his day. Ellis did not subscribe to the typical gendered opposites to configure sadomasochism. He viewed sadism and masochism as fluid and interchangeable within the same person. From the above passage, it is arguable that Ellis may have perpetuated some anti-conventional stereotypes that he justifies with observations of nature, animals, and cultural studies. Ellis seems to replace Krafft-Ebing's stereotype of the sexually aggressive male with his own stereotype of feminine cruelty for sadism that could be argued is demonizing the role of women. On the other hand, Ellis's connection in the above passage between male sexual confidence ("the strong man") and the quality of tenderness was a refreshing switch concerning the depiction of healthy male sexual behavior during the Victorian era. Ellis reversed Krafft-Ebing's male/sadist and female/masochist model for a female/sadist and male/masochist model. In hindsight, neither Ellis's nor Krafft-Ebing's gendered depiction of sadomasochism enjoyed unequivocal support from an empirical-clinical perspective. In hindsight, both Ellis and Krafft-Ebing remained locked in a gendered interpretation of sadomasochism, though Ellis's interpretation was far less restrictive and univocal.

It is fascinating how Ellis waged his own private campaign against patriarchal stereotypes throughout his investigations of sadism and masochism. Ellis maintained an independent perspective and was the first to challenge some of Krafft-Ebing's clouded thinking on gender roles in sadomasochism. Another

example of how Ellis (1903/1936) shook up conventional thinking on masochism is seen below:

Masochism is commonly regarded as a peculiarly feminine sexual perversion, in women, indeed, as normal in some degree, and in man as a sort of inversion of the normal masculine emotional attitude, but this view is not altogether justified, for definite and pronounced masochism seems to be much rarer in women than sadism. (p. 111)

Again, we see how Ellis challenged the popular sexual stereotyping that was initiated by Krafft-Ebing. Krafft-Ebing pathologized masochism as a peculiarly feminine perversion, while Ellis argued that male servitude, including the subjection of the male will to the female, is a common trait in many men that can be seen throughout history (p. 111). Ellis de-pathologized masochism and sadism by asserting the universality of both inclinations in the psyche of men and women alike. Consequently, Ellis helped to counteract the growing tendency among sexologists to conflate male sexuality with sadism and female sexuality with masochism. He did this during a time when the rest of the Victorian patriarchal establishment was giving little thought to the implications that the inaccuracy of gendered binarisms would have on the future understanding of sadomasochism.

Ellis's Significance in the History of Sadomasochism Theories

Ellis was an original thinker on sadomasochism and he helped to shape the direction of its theoretical discourse. His notion that sadism and masochism are two faces of a single entity was picked up by Freud in *Three Essays on The*

Theory of Sexuality (Freud, 1905/1957d, pp. 159-160). The difference was that Ellis viewed the interdependence of sadism and masochism as healthy expressions of love and pain, whereas for Freud, sadism and masochism were two faces of a single perversion (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p. 402).

One of Ellis's strengths was that he paid attention to research outside of clinical psychopathology to form his ideas of sadomasochism. Ellis's investigation of different cultures, races, and the sexual behavior of animals helped to off-set some of Krafft-Ebing's dogmatic assertions that came exclusively from observing cases of incarcerated sex offenders and selected "abnormal" individuals. Ellis's conclusions about sadomasochistic behavior, which were often insightful, well-reasoned and supported by extant research, were applied to ordinary people. He used case methods that were empirical and open-ended. He allowed individuals afflicted with sexual problems like sadomasochism to speak for themselves and he did not pre-empt their self-descriptions for his own interpretations (see Ellis, "The history of Florrie and the mechanism of sexual deviation," 1928, pp. 121-212; Grosskurth, 1980, pp. 232-233).

Although devoid of the gendered stereotypes that distorted the theories of Krafft-Ebing and Freud, Ellis's theory of sadomasochism remained focused primarily on sexual themes.²⁹ Ellis claimed to supplant sexual potency with emotional potency as the primary cause for sadomasochism, but his real focus

²⁹ Ellis wound up developing a biological theory of the emotions to explain sadism and masochism, which converted fear and anger into sexual excitement. This was an inversion of Freud's sexual sublimation theory to explain sadomasochism which emphasized a reverse movement (see Robinson, 1976, p. 24).

remained with sexuality. Throughout Ellis's *oeuvre*, he focused on sex as the primary passion and this was the only context from which he explored sadomasochism. Furthermore, his biological theory of the emotions utterly failed to address the non-sexual manifestations of sadomasochism. Ellis also left out socio-economic influences and other situational contexts that could have been brought to bear on these issues.

Nevertheless, there is a noticeable and admirable absence of the usual Victorian moralistic pretensions masked behind a scientific veil in Ellis's work. He was able to steer clear of many conventional biases such as the privileging of a male patriarchal view of the sex drive to account for sadomasochism and the separation of sadomasochism into two separate perversions. Unlike other sexologists, who embraced Krafft-Ebing's bias on sadomasochism, Ellis remained steadfast in his views and did not capitulate to patriarchal attitudes, bringing humanistic understanding and civility to the public discourse on sadomasochism. He exposed hypocrisy and medical moralisms that were implicit in the early theories of sadomasochism, and which were cloaked under the "value free" neutrality of scientific detachment during his time. Ellis did not view sadomasochism as a perversion in need of a correction as most orthodox 19th century pathologists did. He defended the right of an individual's sexual expression and he fostered the ideals of fairness, understanding, and compassion towards persons labeled as a sexual perverts.

CHAPTER 2

Freud's Theories of Sadomasochism

Introduction: An Overview of Freud's Approach to Sadomasochism

An aporia refers to “a doubtful matter” or “an expression of doubt.”³⁰ This term describes Freud's struggle to explain sadomasochism. For three decades, Freud revised his position on sadomasochism intermittently and kept trying to clarify his views. In this chapter, I show that Freud's continued reliance on heteronormative polarities and his adherence to two or three intrapsychic drives to explain sadomasochism left too many issues unresolved to be viable.³¹ Among contemporary psychoanalysts, Freud's primary masochism theory (based on the death instinct) is appreciated for its originality, but not its therapeutic utility (see Chancer, 1992, chap. 3; DeMasi, 2003, chap. 5). At the same time, Freud's insights on “moral masochism” in “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 157-170) and his consideration of the sadistic and masochistic dynamics of melancholia (Freud, 1917/1962h, pp. 243-258) focused on non-sexual expressions on sadomasochism, paving the way for future developments.

The chapter begins in section A with an examination of Freud's first theoretical assertions on sadism and masochism that followed in the steps of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis. Section B investigates the second phase of Freud's theorizations which were based on the Oedipus complex. Following the presentation of Freud's second

³⁰The term “aporia” comes from Greek Literature. It describes a controversial issue which provokes opposing and incompatible points of view (*Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1993, p. 101)

³¹This thesis takes the position that the existential-humanist perspective was the first perspective to reconfigure sexual sadomasochism without an explicit reliance on heteronormative standards established by Krafft-Ebing and then perpetuated by Freud.

phase, I pause briefly to examine some criticisms of Freud's first two phases. In the last part of section B, I will examine Freud's final phase of sadomasochism theory referred to as primary masochism and follow this with a critique of that last phase.

Section A: The Influences of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis on Freud

As discussed previously, Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) did not believe that sadism and masochism were complementary perversions that were typically found in the same person (p. 142). Ellis countered by suggesting that sadism and masochism are indeed present within each individual and are interchangeable parts of the same entity. In *The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905/1957d, pp. 125-245), Freud's first musings on sadomasochism, we find him attempting to synthesize both Krafft-Ebing's and Ellis's positions under the umbrella of a new, emerging theory of infantile psychosexual development (De Masi, 2003, p. 29). As a neuropathologist, Freud's views on psychopathology were closer to those of Krafft-Ebing than to those of Ellis, because Ellis was not a pathologist. Nonetheless, Freud incorporated Ellis's "normalizing" view of sadomasochism, by stating that a moderate amount of sadomasochism was intrinsic to the ordinary psychosexual development of most people, which begins during the early (pre-genital) stages of childhood (Freud, 1905/1957d, section II, part 6). In other words, according to Freud, sadistic and masochistic tendencies were belated expressions of earlier psychosexual stages, and part of being a "normal" heterosexual adult. In his first remarks on sadism and masochism, he wrote that "sadism and masochism

occupy a special position among the perversions since the contrast between activity and passivity which lies behind them is among the universal characteristics of sexual life” (Freud, 1905/1957d, p. 159). Freud then continued:

The active and passive forms [of sadomasochism] are habitually found to occur together in the same individual. A person who feels pleasure in producing pain in someone else in a sexual relationship is also capable of enjoying as pleasure any pain, which he may himself derive from sexual relations. A sadist is always at the same time a masochist, although the active or the passive aspect of the perversion may be the more strongly developed in him and may represent his predominant sexual activity. (p. 159)³²

Despite this important point of convergence with Ellis, Freud’s first views of sadism and masochism were closer to Krafft-Ebing’s theorizations in two major ways. First, Freud (1905/1957d) believed, as Krafft-Ebing did, that sadomasochism was primarily driven by a sexually aggressive libidinal instinct (pp. 157-158) rather than by the manifest emotions of love and pain.³³ The second key point of convergence with Krafft-Ebing was that Freud supported the same gendered stereotypes (i.e., sadism/masochism and masculinity/femininity) to configure sadomasochism (De Masi, 2003, p. 10). The influence of Freud’s infantile psychosexual theory and its accompanying explanation of sado-

³² Freud (1905/1957d) acknowledged Ellis’s investigations of sadism and masochism in a footnote to this passage, and borrowed Ellis’s idea of interchangeability between sadism and masochism (pp. 159-160).

³³ Freud’s reading of sadism and masochism at that time was closer to the tradition of the degeneration theory of Morel and Magnan, two of Krafft-Ebing’s mentors, who posited all mental illness as a symptom of a decayed nervous system although Freud theorized that the personal unconscious rather than the nervous system is the source of all psychic disturbances.

masochism eventually overshadowed the theories of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, both of whom had difficulty accepting Freud's views.³⁴

Section B: Freud's Theories of Sadomasochism

The best way to examine Freud's theories on sadomasochism is to separate them into three distinct phases. The first phase can be referred to as the "sadism as primary phase." The second phase will be referred to as Freud's "Oedipalization phase," and Freud's final stage will be referred to as his "masochism as primary phase." It is important to call attention to the fact that throughout each of his different phases, Freud always conceptualized the connection between sadism and masochism to be so close that one could never be studied apart from the other (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p. 402). The other important point is that Freud considered sadomasochism to be among the universal characteristics of sexual life (p. 402). In the first two phases, we find him privileging sadism based on the primary instincts of sex and aggression. In his third and final phase, we find Freud privileging masochism as the primary process based on a death instinct.³⁵

Freud's First Phase: Sadism as a Primary Process

In his "sadism as primary" phase, Freud's speculations on sadomasochism coincided with his broader ideas of psychoanalytic theory in general. As Franco de

³⁴As mentioned in chapter 1 (p. 29, FN ¹⁷), Krafft-Ebing, who was an advocate of Freud's disagreed with his theory of hysteria, but he did have an interest in childhood sexuality theories. Ellis called the Oedipal theory "a pernicious doctrine" and was a more vocal critic of Freud's and his follower's methods though he admired Freud, personally (see Grosskurth, 1980, p. 233-235).

³⁵We will see later how this reversal demonstrated Freud's espousal of the death instinct as the primary drive to all psychic life.

Masi (2003), a psychoanalytic historian and theorist of sadomasochism summed it up, “For Freud . . .the entities of ‘sadism’ and ‘masochism’ flow together into the larger crucible of psychosexuality, of the formation of sexual identity in its final forms (masculine/feminine, active/passive), variants (homosexuality) and pathology (sadomasochistic perversion)” (p. 29). Near the end of the first phase, Freud’s presented a topographical outline of the sadomasochistic drive in “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (Freud, 1915/1962g, pp. 117-140). It was the first schematic outline of sadomasochism. Freud followed his schematic outline with an object-relational discussion of sadomasochistic dynamics involved in loss and grief in “Mourning and Melancholia” (Freud, 1917/1962h, pp. 243-258).

It was also during this time that Freud took the position that sadism was primary to masochism.³⁶ Years later, with the benefit of hindsight, Freud (1929/1962a) wrote about his first period of theorizing about sadomasochism:

The sadistic instinct stood out from the rest, it is true, in that its aim was so very far from being loving. Moreover, it was obviously in some respects attached to the ego instincts: it could not hide its close affinity with instincts of mastery which have no libidinal purpose. But these discrepancies were gotten over; after all sadism was clearly a part of the sexual life, in the activities of which could be replaced by cruelty. (pp. 117-118)

³⁶ The amount of revisions in Freud’s conceptualization of the connection between sadism and masochism can be seen in the number footnotes he added to the section called “sadism and masochism” (Freud, 1905/1957d, pp. 157-159) where Freud first posited sadism as the primary process.

Furthermore, Freud maintained from the beginning that all perversions, including sadism and masochism have both normal and pathological intensities and modes of expression. Freud (1905/1957d) wrote:

It is natural that medical men, who first studied perversions in outstanding examples and under special conditions, should have been inclined to regard them . . . as indications of degeneracy or disease. . . Everyday experience has shown that most of these extensions, or at any rate the less severe of them, are constituents which are rarely absent from the sexual life of healthy people. (p. 160) ³⁷

Despite the boldness and originality of this approach, one detects ambivalence in Freud as to whether to privilege male sexual aggression or a non-sexual conceptualization of aggression to explain sadism. At one point, one finds Freud advocating a gendered notion of masculinity, equating it with sadism, and a corresponding association of femininity with masochism (De Masi, 2003, p. 10). At another point, Freud posits a non-gendered concept of active and passive forces to explain the sadomasochistic drive. For example, after crediting Krafft-Ebing for being the first to associate the desire to humiliate and subjugate another person with the concept of sadism (Freud, 1905/1957d, p. 157) we find him linking the notions of masculinity with aggression and sadism.

Freud stated:

³⁷ Freud also indicated in this essay that he thought homosexuality (inversion) should not be included in his normalizing view of the perversions (see Freud, 1905/1957d, p. 160). In his later works, such as "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Women" (1920/1962m) and in a letter to a despairing mother of a gay child (as cited in Jones, 1957, p. 195), Freud clearly expresses tolerance of homosexuality and states that he did not classify it as an illness.

The sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of *aggressiveness* — a desire to subjugate; the biological significance of it seems to lie in the need for overcoming the resistance of the sexual object by means other than the process of wooing. (p.157)

As the above remarks suggest, Freud viewed male sexuality to be inherently aggressive. Less than two pages later however, we find him declaring that aggression alone cannot account for sadism or masochism. Curiously, he next posited a theory of innate bisexuality to help explain sadism and masochism. In his own words:

It is, moreover, a suggestive fact that the existence of the pair of opposites formed by sadism and masochism cannot be attributed merely to the element of aggressiveness. We should rather be inclined to connect the simultaneous presence of these opposites with the opposing masculinity and femininity which are combined in bisexuality — a contrast which often has to be replaced in psycho-analysis by that between activity and passivity. (Freud, 1905/1957d, p.160)

The final statement at the end of the previous passage declares that psychoanalysis replaces the contrast between masculinity and femininity with a more neutral contrast between active and passive forces. It is an alternative to the first theory, rather than a re-statement of the theory in slightly different terms. This is one illustration of how Freud deferred the resolution of old theories to newer models and terms while leaving his original theoretical problems unexplained. The use of binary opposites that are

continually being reconstituted in slightly different terms is characteristic of all of Freud's theorizing on sadomasochism.³⁸

In a second essay, "Infantile Sexuality," from *Three essays on the theory of sexuality* (Freud, 1905/1957d, pp. 173-206), we find Freud changing his formula yet again. This time he took a more "neutral" position claiming that the active and passive forces of normal sadomasochism appears *prior* to the sexualization of sadomasochistic tendencies instead of *vice-versa* as previously suggested. Later in the essay, Freud discussed the origin of the active/passive tendencies found in the second pre-genital stage of psychosexual development, which he refers to as "the sadistic-anal stage." Freud wrote:

Here the opposition of two currents, which runs through all sexual life, is already developed: they cannot yet, however, be described as 'masculine' and 'feminine,' but only as 'active' and 'passive.' The *activity* is put into operation by the instinct for mastery through the agency of the somatic musculature; the organ which, more than any other, represents the *passive* sexual aim is the erotogenic mucous membrane of the anus. . . . In this phase, therefore, sexual polarity and an extraneous object are already observable. But organization and subordination to the reproductive function are still absent. (Freud, 1905/1957d, p. 198)

³⁸ Robert Holt (1989), a critic of psychoanalysis, has noted that many of Freud's early assertions about psychoanalytic concepts display a strong theoretical ambivalence that accompanies "an unusual tolerance of inconsistency" (p. 46). Kurt Lewin (1937/1999), writing closer to Freud's own time period noted that Freud used an exploratory technique to establish "laws" of human behavior that was less than conceptual when contrasted with other theories in psychology (pp. 67-68).

It is difficult to determine whether Freud is privileging the libido, primary bisexuality, or a “neutral” conceptualization of active and passive forces in his theorization of sadomasochism when reviewing the above passage. As evidence of his uncertainty on the relationship between aggression and sex, Freud admitted in “Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Year-Old Boy” (Freud, 1909/1957a, pp. 3-148) that, “I cannot bring myself to assume the existence of a special aggressive instinct alongside of the familiar instincts of self-preservation and of sex, and on an equal footing with them” (p. 140). One can see from his various theoretical assertions, revisions,³⁹ and tendency to leave previous ideas unclarified that Freud was not comfortable with the idea of more than one or two drives to explain sado-masochistic behavior.⁴⁰ At the end of his first phase, Freud accepted the ideas of a sexual libido, aggression, and the instinct for self-preservation as the major drives to explain sadomasochism, but remained unable to articulate a clear, consistent theory that linked them together.

As already mentioned, the end of Freud’s first phase saw his presentation of the first schematic outline of sadomasochism in “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes” (Freud, 1915/1962g, pp. 117-140). In the following passage, Freud describes sadomasochism in non-gendered terms: as a result of the synthesis of antagonistic instincts:

³⁹ Holt (1989) has noted that Freud’s *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905/1957d) “went through...six editions...each spanning two or more major periods in the development of Freud’s thought, including a far reaching change in his metapsychology....There was never any fundamental reconsideration of these works...of earlier and later theories (p.47)].

⁴⁰ Freud’s tendency to refer to one or two drives in his drive theory was described by Erich Fromm (1969/1970) as derived from a “concept of scarcity” (p. 46) as opposed to a concept of abundance that includes multiple drives.

Sexual and ego-instincts can readily develop an antithesis which repeats that of love and hate. When the ego-instincts dominate the sexual function, as is the case at the stage of the sadistic-anal organization, they impart the qualities of hate to the instinctual aim as well. (p. 139)

In the above schema, love is fused with the sexual libido,⁴¹ while hate is interpreted as an infantile expression of the instinct of ego self-preservation. The concepts of love and hate appeared as central issues in another discussion of sadomasochism that Freud published two years later. "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1917/1962h, pp. 243-258) is an important paper because it is where we find Freud first noting sadomasochistic dynamics that stem from the loss of a loved person, or, what he referred to as "a strong fixation to a love-object" (p. 249). In the following depiction of sadomasochism, which is associated with the processes of grief and melancholia, Freud does not involve sexuality to be a direct or explicit motive. Instead, we find sadomasochistic pleasure depicted as being neurotic compensation for the loss of a highly regarded or loved person that is colored by a desire for revenge. Freud noted that in grief, sadomasochistic tendencies can be overcome through the restoration of a "good-object"⁴² associated with the lost loved one. Freud (1917, 1962k) wrote:

⁴¹ Besides attaching the concept of love to the sexual libido in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," (Freud, 1915/1962g, p. 139), Freud also equated the idea of love with narcissism (p. 138; also, see "On Narcissism" (Freud, 1914/1962k, pp. 67-102)

⁴² "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1917/1962k, pp. 243-258) is also the first place where one can spot the hint of an object-relational approach to sadomasochism theory based on the concept of projective identification. Melanie Klein's object-relational approach to sadomasochism theory will be examined in chapter 3.

The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies. . .a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate which relate to an object, and which have been turned round upon the subject's own self. . . .

The patients usually. . .succeed. . .in taking revenge on the original object and in tormenting their loved one through their illness. (p. 251)

In reviewing the above passage, it bears repeating that throughout “Mourning and Melancholia” (Freud, 1917/1962k, pp. 248-253) there is a notable absence of references to sexuality. He uses the terms “love,” “self-love,” “object-love,” and “transference-love” frequently in that paper along with references of self-hatred and hatred towards others whenever explaining sadomasochistic processes. At the same time, his discovery that the loss of a loved one could trigger a “sadomasochistic” desire for self-punishment (as a substitute for revenge) did not change his espousal of a theory that privileged sex and aggression as the original causes of the phenomenon.

By the end of his first phase of theorizing about the sadomasochistic complex, Freud endorsed three basic ideas: First, the sexual libido and ego aggression, which are in conflict with each other are the principle drives behind sadomasochism; second, sadistic drives precede masochistic ones; and third, Freud viewed sadomasochism as part of the normal psychosexual development of healthy adults as much as he associated it with abnormal sexuality.⁴³ As the second decade of the 20th century came to a close, Freud set aside his previous mechanistic and psycho-physiological schemas of sadomasochism and turned to

⁴³ According to Freud (1905/1957d), normal sadomasochism is expressed through neurotic symptoms, whereas sadomasochism as a perversion is expressed in fantasies and/or actions without diversionary symptoms (p. 165).

his clinical work. Using the clinical observations from his own work with analysands, Freud focused on elaborating the concept of the Oedipal complex as the linchpin to explain the difference between the developments of normal sadomasochism from the development of sadomasochism as a perversion. As we shall see, this phase would be very short-lived. It was followed by Freud's proposal of a dual-instinct theory based on a new psycho-biological principle which he referred to as 'a death instinct' (Freud, 1920/1962b, p. 54).

Freud's Second Phase: The Oedipalization of Sadomasochism

Freud's theory of primary sadism articulated in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (Freud, 1915/1962g, pp. 109-140) left him unsatisfied. He shifted his attention away from a purely theoretical conceptualization of sadomasochism and turned to its occurrence in the lives of his clients, which he believed was a common experience for everyone based on fantasies and dreams recalled in analysis.

Freud was particularly drawn to six of his analysands' sadomasochistic beating-fantasies, which he found to be surprisingly common in "A Child is Being Beaten: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions" (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-204). He concentrated on the analysis of the four female cases in that study to support a two-fold conclusion: first, the Oedipal complex is the nucleus of sadomasochism as a normal infantile perversion of childhood; and second, masochism is a derivative of sadism. As for the two male cases, who did not follow the guidelines of an Oedipal interpretation that would explain a normal sadomasochistic infantile perversion, Freud claimed that they were "true masochists in the sense of being sexual perverts" (p. 196). At the same time, he

was perpetuating Krafft-Ebing's original and questionable association between feminine characteristics and male masochism. Freud claimed that each of the male masochists "invariably transfer themselves into the part of a woman [in the fantasy], that is to say, their masochistic attitude coincides with a *feminine* one" (p. 197). At the same time, Freud admitted his confusion about the fact that in all cases of male masochism it was a woman who administered the beatings. In fact, he questioned whether or not "a feminine attitude" (p. 197) wasn't a universal feature of all infantile beating fantasies. In a later footnote, Freud deferred a fuller explanation of what he meant by "this feminine attitude" (p. 197) to a later discussion of feminine masochism in the essay called "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 157-170). It should be pointed out that feminine masochism has never received any empirical support as a real clinical phenomenon.

Another problem in "A Child is Being Beaten" (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-204) was that not one of Freud's cases was actually diagnosed with a sexual perversion. In spite of these discrepancies and others, including the fact that the sixth case was none other than Freud's own daughter, Anna, with whom Freud was conducting an analysis during the time he wrote his clinical study (Young-Bruehl, 1988, pp.103-139), "A Child Is Being Beaten" (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-204) is nonetheless a curious exploration of the sadomasochistic dynamics of childhood fantasies.

According to Freud, each of his six analysand's beating-fantasies followed three distinct stages that could be grouped according to different aspects of the

sadomasochistic theme. In stage one, the sadistic phase of the fantasy, Freud noted that each child fantasized another child being beaten by an unidentified third party, who is transformed into the father of the child having the fantasy. In phase two, which is an unconscious masochistic stage, the child (subject) who observes the beating suddenly imagines herself/himself as the child who is being beaten by her or his own father. In the final stage of the fantasy, the second stage becomes projected onto others in a repressed manner as the father who was beating the child becomes an unidentified authority figure (*i.e.*, a teacher) who is beating a group of anonymous children. Freud also noted that the last stage of the fantasy “has strong and unambiguous sexual excitement attached to it” (p. 184).

Freud explained the sexual excitement attached in the fantasy in the following way: the first stage of the beating fantasy, which is sadistic, is transformed into masochism in stage 2 due to feelings of unconscious guilt about sadistic feelings. But there is also guilt associated with the masochistic genital stimulation attached to the parental-object in the second stage (p. 194). So, repression takes over and the fantasy is converted to a projection of others being beaten in the final phase of the fantasy by an anonymous authority figure, which is still erotically charged. According to Freud, the core of Oedipal guilt in the sadomasochistic fantasy is not uncovered by his analysis but by an essential kind of masochism that “afterwards persists...[and] seems to correspond to a scar-like formation...similar to the sense of inferiority” (p. 194).

It should be pointed out that the father is the only erotically charged object for the girl’s sadomasochistic fantasy and therefore, the only source of conflict leading

to the outcome of essential masochism. If however, Freud had acknowledged that “the role of the pre-oedipal mother in the origins of sadomasochism and the beating fantasy” (Novick and Novick, 1997, p. 40) are just as significant as the role of the father, he might not have constructed “essential masochism” as the only kind of normal sadomasochism (i.e., a normal neurosis), nor might he have depicted it as “feminine.” As for the two male cases, Freud noted the parallels are not quite symmetrical because while the mother is claimed as the erotically charged object for the boy in the 2 cases studied, Freud noted that neither one of the male analysand’s repressed the sexual attachment to the mother in phase 2 in the same way that the girls repressed the sexual attachment to the father-object. Moreover, neither male analysand substituted the figure of themselves as the sole recipient of the beating for a group of others as expected in stage 3. This is what led Freud (1919/1962c) to conclude that his male subjects were “true masochists in the sense of being sexual perverts” (p. 196) rather than concede that the Oedipal theory might be problematic. Freud remained steadfast in his conclusion that the Oedipal complex was the linchpin for “normal” sadomasochism. Before going on to his next phase of theorizing about sadomasochism, I will pause to take a closer look at some criticisms of Freud’s first two stages of sadomasochism theory.

An Appraisal of Freud’s First Two Phases of Sadomasochism Theories

Sexual Polarities

Whether he was conceiving sadism as an innate part of the male sex drive as in his first stage of theorizing about sadomasochism, or trying to stretch the Oedipal theory as a cause of normal sadomasochism, Freud continued to cling to

the misguided notion that male sexuality corresponds with the idea of sadistic aggression and that female sexuality is coterminous with passivity and masochism. By clinging to this aspect of his Oedipal theory, Freud maintained a prescriptive bias which guided his investigation of the beating fantasies of his six analysands in “A Child is Being Beaten” (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-204). It is interesting that Freud suggested that his own motivation to inquire into the nature of the sadomasochistic fantasies of his analysands was driven by his strivings as a theoretician than as a psychoanalyst concerned with the therapeutic outcome of his analysands when he wrote that, “theoretical knowledge is still far more important to all of us than therapeutic success” (p. 181). At the same time, it would be misleading to represent Freud’s efforts in “A Child is Being Beaten” (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-204) to be a “value free” scientific approach to the understanding of sadomasochism. Perhaps, it is more accurate to appropriate Freud’s approach as a “teleological⁴⁴ perspective of [hetero-normative] sexuality” (Bersani, 1986, p. 31), or as an anthropomorphic approach (Lewin, 1937/1999, p. 67). Had Freud remained open to the idea that more than one ultimate explanation could have accounted for his analysands’ sadomasochistic beating fantasies in “A Child is Being Beaten,” it is reasonable to speculate that he would not have proposed the “rather fixed general rules, formulae, and sequences . . . for the causation of perversion” (Shengold, 1997, p. 89), which are now recognized by most analysts. For example, pre-Oedipal dynamics are likely to play as much of a role in sadomasochistic fantasies as Oedipal dynamics.

⁴⁴ A teleology is a doctrine that proposes the final causes of things. It is an interpretation that has an end and a purpose.

Another triggering source for sadomasochistic tendencies could have been socio-economic factors. Nevertheless, despite realizing that his findings were problematic, Freud refused to consider “tracing out their dependence on other factors, as...[he did] not consider that the material for observation to be exhaustive” (Freud, 1919/1962, p. 200). If one takes a step back to characterize Freud’s theoretical style during his second phase, there are two characteristics that stand out: first, there was Freud’s tendency to cling to rigid rules for psychosexual development; and second, Freud had an unmistakable penchant for employing dualistic themes of conflict whenever explaining sadomasochistic dynamics. Both of these ideas can be traced back directly to Krafft-Ebing.

Oedipalization and the Pathology of Normalcy

As mentioned earlier, a problem with Freud’s first two phases of sadomasochism theory was that he utilized a strict hetero-normative standard of healthy sexual behavior. In “A Child is Being Beaten” (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-205), Freud normalized the sexual aims of female masochism in the beating fantasies of his analysands, while pathologizing male masochism.⁴⁵ In this way, Freud perpetuated the same conflation of masculinity with normal sadistic aggression and femininity with normal masochism that suffused Krafft-Ebing’s theory of sadism and masochism. In Freud’s post-Galilean methods however, the normalization of these misguided notions were subsumed under the

⁴⁵ The psychoanalyst Leonard Shengold (1997) proposes that Freud could have been taken more seriously in “A Child is Being Beaten” (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-204) if he had entertained the idea that “in relation to sex we all basically want to be and have everything — mother *and* father, girls *and* boys, women *and* men” (p. 89).

“scientific” concept of serialization.⁴⁶ Serialization allows for female masochism to be viewed as an acceptable perversion while male masochism is declared as a morally transgressive act involving sexual pleasure. Moreover, by emphasizing the subjective perception that male masochism is a “transgressive action out of which pleasure arises” (p. 16) Freud alluded to its connection with a “feminine attitude” and homosexuality (Freud, 1919/1962c, p. 199). Conscious or not, serialization conveys the notions of goodness and evil embedded in the concepts of normal and pathological. The idea of the “acceptable perversion” implied by serialization hinged on the explanation of the Oedipal conflict, which was its cause. As Freud stated:

The perversion is no longer an isolated fact in the child’s sexual life, but falls into place among the typical, not to say normal, processes of development which are familiar to us. It is brought into relation with the child’s incestuous love-object, with its Oedipus complex. (p. 192)

It can be gleaned from the above passage that Freud was declaring the “normal perversion” to be an inevitable part of ordinary psychosexual development if the Oedipal conflict is resolved. At the same time, Freud also spoke of perversion as an “abnormal sexual constitution...which consumes the subject’s whole sexual life” (p. 192) if the Oedipal conflict is not resolved (p. 196). What was not realized at the time was that the Oedipal conflict is a cultural artifact. Today, we understand how social ideology can proscribe a theory such as the Oedipal complex that can make explanations for human growth and development of the

⁴⁶ Serialization was first defined in the introduction on page 6. It will be discussed again in chapter 5

personality to seem transhistorical. Though Freud was troubled by the lack of clear support for his Oedipal explanation of sadomasochistic fantasies for both his male and female analysands, as we will see next, he refused to consider alternate explanations.

Rejecting Alternate Hypotheses

As already mentioned, Freud (1919/1962c) admitted that his findings on the differences between male and female beating fantasies were inconclusive, but he refused to abandon the Oedipal theory. Consequently, he dismissed alternate theories of the sadomasochistic beating fantasies proposed by Jung and Adler. First, he dismissed a theory “based on the fact of the bisexual constitution of human beings” (p. 200), which he mentioned earlier in his first phase of theorizing on sadomasochism (see Freud, 1905/1957d, p. 160). Freud also rejected Adler’s “masculine protest” theory of repression to explain the sadomasochistic fantasy, which he declared “looks for support to sociological rather than biological sources” and is “responsible for the whole formation both of character and of neuroses” (Freud, 1919/1962c, p. 201). Regarding Adler’s latter alternative, Freud briefly considered the idea that cultural pressures may come to bear on the expression of sadomasochism, but then he dismissed Adler’s theory by “firmly [holding] to the view that the motive forces of repression must not be sexualized” (p. 204). What Freud seemed to ignore in Adler’s theory was that the impact of culture, social institutions, and the nuclear family are powerful forces that can contribute to sadomasochistic tendencies. While he did not agree with any of the alternative theories presented at the time he wrote “A Child is Being Beaten” (Freud,

1919/1962c, pp. 175-204), he continued to be dissatisfied with his Oedipal explanation of sadomasochism also. Consequently, Freud moved into his final phase of theorizing on sadomasochism grounded on a new psychobiological premise.

Freud's Final Phase: Masochism as a Primary Process

A year after the publication of “A Child is Being Beaten” (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-204), Freud returned once again to a conceptualization of sado-masochism based on instinct theory, but this time he called it a “death instinct.” As mentioned previously, Freud introduced the death instinct in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (Freud, 1920/1962b, pp. 3-64). He speculated that underneath sadism there was a “displaced” death instinct which took aim at the ego and “under the influence of the narcissistic libido, [the death instinct] has been forced away from the ego and emerged in relation to an [external] object” (p. 54). Previously, Freud viewed masochism as a secondary regressive movement which opposed the primary sadistic drive. In his final theorization of sadomasochism however, we find him conceding that “there ‘might’ be such a thing as primary masochism— a possibility which [he] had contested” (p. 54). At the same time he was shifting from primary sadism to primary masochism, Freud did not abandon the idea that sexual aggression is intrinsic to sadomasochism. In his new theory of primary masochism, the death instinct (*Thanatos*) co-mingled with the sexual libido (*Eros*) after being turned away from the ego (narcissistic libido) to form sadistic aggression. Based on these new set of psychobiological premises to explain

sadomasochism as emanating from a primary process of masochism, Freud turned his attention towards the classification of three new types of clinical masochism.

In “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 157-170), Freud proposed three new forms of masochism that were all based on his theory of a primary masochism founded on the death instinct. The first of the three he referred to as “erotogenic” masochism. Freud defined erotogenic masochism as “a condition under which sexual excitation may be aroused” (p. 161). One gets a sense that Freud was being somewhat elusive when describing erotogenic masochism as he wrote “its basis must be sought along biological and constitutional lines and it remains incomprehensible unless one decides to make certain assumptions about such matters that are extremely obscure” (p. 161). The second form, which Freud referred to as “feminine” masochism,” was described as “the form most accessible to observation, least mysterious, and is comprehensible in all its relations” (p. 62). What is interesting is that despite Freud’s claim that feminine masochism is the most accessible form of masochism, it has never been clinically validated as a form of masochism to this day (Novick and Novick, 1997, p. 40). Nonetheless, Freud claimed that feminine masochism is rooted in “a characteristically female situation . . . with being castrated, or being copulated with, or giving birth to a baby” (p. 162). One is reminded of Krafft-Ebing’s (1886/1965) description of masochism as “a pathological degeneration of the distinctive psychical peculiarities of woman” (p. 133) when encountering Freud’s description of feminine masochism according to the biological characteristics of females.

The third form of masochism, “moral” masochism, according to Freud, is a manifestation of a non-erotic form of self-inflicted suffering connected “to an unconscious sense of guilt. . .[or a] ‘need for punishment’”(Jones, 1957, p. 259). Moral masochism did not fall in line with the conventional thinking of sadomasochism as a pure sexual perversion. Freud admitted that he had to loosen the idea of “what we recognize as sexuality” (Freud, 1924/1962e, p. 165) in order to explain moral masochism. In the same manner that he noticed a non-sexual foundation for sadomasochistic behavior in “Mourning and Melancholia” (Freud, 1917/1962h, pp. 243-258) and continued to use libido theory to explain moral masochism, Freud continued with a dual instinct theory that privileged a death instinct intertwined with the sexual libido to explain sadomasochism. Consequently, though Freud himself discovered an opening in his theory of sadomasochism that could have de-centered the role of the sexual instincts as a cause, sex remained the privileged view even for forms of sadomasochism that were expressed non-sexually. As sociologist Lynn Chancer (1992) writes:

The introduction of moral masochism was the first sign in the Freudian opus that a sadomasochistic *character* needed to be explored in other than its explicitly sexual or instinctual incarnations. Until this juncture, Freud’s explanation of sadomasochism reinforced the commonsensical association of sadomasochism with sex and the behavior of individuals. However, the moral masochistic type. . . points beyond sexual manifestations to a wider meaning of sadomasochism. (p. 87)

There is little question that Freud's examination of moral masochism in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 157-170) exposed the cracks in his own earlier theories of sadomasochism as a strictly sexual phenomenon. Freud himself acknowledged that moral masochism led him to believe that sexuality may not be directly involved (p. 164). As we shall see later in chapter 4, Erich Fromm would be the first psychoanalyst to develop a theory of sadomasochism that did loosen the bonds of sexuality from sadomasochistic behavior as Freud suggested in the case of moral masochism. However, as much as it would have appeared to open the door to other causal theories of sadomasochism, Freud's investigation of moral masochism did not inspire much speculation beyond the sexual instincts as the primary cause for sadomasochism, as pointed out by Chancer (1992) in the above passage. Some psychoanalytic theorists of sadomasochism, like Wilhelm Reich (1932/1961; 1933/1970) however, began looking at historical and social factors as will be seen in chapter 3.

Evaluating Freud's Final Phase of Sadomasochism Theory

Freud's Use of Dualisms

If one looks past the male/female polarity which was intermittently implied throughout all phases of his theorizing on sadomasochism, one finds Freud constructing sadomasochistic processes as a set of opposing psychic motivations pitted against one another in other ways. Starting with his first two phases of theorizations, one finds three major polarities that Freud typically deployed whenever explaining sadomasochism that he explicitly listed in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" (Freud, 1915/1962g, pp. 109-140). These were: "that of

activity—passivity [or] the *biological*, that of ego—external world...[or] the *real*, and finally that of pleasure-unpleasure” (p. 140). In “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 157-170), one finds the major sets of polarities that Freud deployed in his final stage of theorizing on sadomasochism. These were: the opposition between life (*Eros*) and death (*Thanatos*); the tension between pleasure (the law of constancy) and un-pleasure (the nirvana principle); and the antithesis of reason versus intuition.⁴⁷

Freud’s deployment of binary dualisms, which can be traced throughout each stage of his different theories of sadomasochism reflect the natural scientific attitude grounded on the Western tradition of Aristotelian logic (Fromm, 1956, p. 68), which is useful in the production of knowledge, but can also be counter to the production of insight (Burston, 2003, p. 168). Jessica Benjamin (1988), a current psychoanalytic theorist of sadomasochism, who refers to Freud’s use of dualisms as a “dialectic of control” (p. 53) suggests that sadomasochism theorists like Freud and Hegel, who are steeped in Aristotelian logic tended to presume human nature to be intrinsically aggressive and requiring either/or choices (Chancer, 1992, p. 71).

It is arguable that Freud’s excessive use of binary dualisms, which are detectable throughout his theories of sadomasochism led to very little insight about the nature of sadomasochism when compared to his observations. For instance, in his second phase of theorizing, Freud published “Mourning and Melancholia” (Freud, 1917/1962h, pp. 243-258), which provided some of his best insights on

⁴⁷This last pair included the law of constancy and the nirvana principle, which are analogous with the antithetical contrast between the rational (or, the real) and the mystical (or the intuitive).

sadomasochistic processes that are responses to loss. His use of the binary pair of the ego (self) and external world object makes sense only when grounded in the observation of loss. At other points, Freud's deployment of the dualisms of masculine/ feminine and active/ passive do not appear grounded on observation. In his discussion of feminine masochism for example, one sees Freud's use of the male/female and active/passive dichotomy (Freud, 1924/1962e, p. 159) leading to unfortunate misconceptions such as the conflation of male masochism with heterosexual impotency, effeminacy, and homosexuality (p. 160) that is reminiscent of Krafft-Ebing.⁴⁸

Another explanation of Freud's use of polarities is that he may have had a need (perhaps an egoistic one) to have psychoanalysis stand apart from rival theories, especially those from Jung and Adler. In the passage quoted below from "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (Freud, 1920/1962b, pp. 3-63) for example, Freud makes an effort to differentiate his psychoanalytic approach from Jung's. Freud wrote:

Our views have from the very first been *dualistic*, and to-day they are even more definitely dualistic than before—now that we describe the opposition as being, not between ego instincts and sexual instincts but between life instincts and death instincts. Jung's libido theory is on the contrary *monistic*. (p. 53)

⁴⁸ One gets a sense of Freud's disinterest and irritation with cases of male masochism in "The Economic problem of Masochism" (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 157-170). For example, Freud wrote, "The masochist wants to be treated like a little, helpless, dependent child, but especially like a naughty child. It is unnecessary to adduce case-material in this connection for it is all so much alike and is accessible to any observer, even to non-analysts...one easily discovers in them ...characteristic[s] of womanhood" (p. 160).

As the above passage makes clear, Freud grew stronger in his advocacy of the use of dualisms to conceptualize sadomasochism, which reduced sadomasochism to one or two needs that were in perpetual conflict with each other. One can see a kind of morality play taking place in the above passage where the forces of evil (Thanatos) are at war with the forces of good (Eros) in an intra-psychic battle for supremacy. Just as the first two phases of Freud's theory of sadomasochism may be best read as teleological narratives of hetero-normative sexuality, it may be more helpful to interpret Freud's last phase of theorizing on sadomasochism as a teleology of the eternal conflict between life and death forces. One may argue that Freud's use of dualisms, which reached their zenith in his final phase of theorizing interfered with a fuller understanding of sadomasochism since they were really a rhetorical strategy being presented as a scientific fact.

The Scientism in Freud's Theory of Sadomasochism

It is noteworthy that many of Freud's post Galilean theorizations of sadomasochism deployed concepts based on biological and physiological principles that were speculative from an empirical standpoint while conveying a value-free attitude of scientific detachment. Many of Freud's intuitive findings were embedded in scientistic language, such as his privileging of sexual libido drive and his later insistence on a death instinct, which tended to leave certain of his ideas unexplained and which only a few psychoanalysts questioned. Moreover, Freud's privileging of hetero-normative standards in his theories of sadomasochism were justified scientifically, though he clearly challenged conventional norms when he introduced

the notion of sadomasochism as an ordinary constituent of psychic development. If one considers Freud's observations regarding non-erotic attachments in loss and grief, (see Freud, 1917/1962h, pp. 243; also, see De Masi, 2003, chap. 4), it can be argued that his theoretical reliance on the intra-psychic themes of sex, aggression, and death to explain sadomasochism interfered with a fuller appreciation of other human needs that are also involved in sadomasochistic outcomes. The same can be said for moral masochism, where Freud first embraced the idea that something other than a strict view of sexuality was needed as a causal theory of sadomasochism. In the passage cited below from Freud's discussion of moral masochism, there is a notable absence of scientific dualisms and hypothetical claims that comes across in his observation of the importance of strong loving relationships. Freud stated:

Masochism, the moral type, is chiefly remarkable for having loosened its connection with what we recognize to be sexuality. To all other masochistic sufferings there still clings the condition that it should be administered by the loved person; it is endured at his command; in the moral type of masochism this limitation has been dropped. It is the suffering itself that matters; whether the sentence is cast by a loved one or by an indifferent person is of no importance. (Freud, 1924/1962e, p. 164)

The above passage could be said to reveal a more human disturbance that is non-dependent on biological theories or gendered hypothetical notions of sexuality. Freud's reading of moral masochism as seen above contrasts sharply with his scientific dualistic formations of sadomasochism in other places. In the tradition

of Krafft-Ebing, Freud never stopped assuming the presence of an intra-psychic instinctive mechanism to be at the core of his theory of sadomasochism as a sexual perversion, despite his findings which suggested that other reasons for sadomasochism might be possible.

Concluding Remarks on the Freudian Era of Sadomasochism Theory

Following his explication of three different forms of masochism based on the death instinct, the age of strictly sexual and morbidly unconscious drive theories to explain sadomasochism began sharing the spotlight with other types of psychoanalytic approaches. Freud's intra-psychic theory of sadomasochism began to give way to some other approaches that incorporated social and other extrinsic sources as explanatory factors of sadomasochism. In the next chapter, we will begin looking at some post-Freudian thinkers who suggested theories of sadomasochism that went beyond individual psychic causes.

It can be said that the turning point for a new era in sadomasochism theory followed Freud's investigation of moral masochism, which suggested that a loosening of the idea of sexuality as a primary cause may be advisable. Though Freud was clearly the most prolific theorist of sadomasochism during this time, the intellectual heritage of his approach to sadomasochism—particularly with respect to its gendered binarisms – is indebted to Krafft-Ebing, who is the source of most of Freud's psychoanalytic formulations on sadomasochism theory.⁴⁹

Following Freud, a shift in focus of sadomasochism theory began which addressed pre-oedipal dynamics, interpersonal factors, and a new awareness of

⁴⁹ It tends to be forgotten how much of Krafft-Ebing's basic outline of sadomasochism was kept alive by Freud (see De Masi, 2003, chap. 2)

the role that society and culture played in sadomasochistic outcomes. Marxist ideology and new philosophical approaches began intersecting with psychoanalytic theory, psychology, and sociology leading to new sadomasochism theories. In the next chapter, we will look at some of the first post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories that incorporate social and cultural theories into the discourse of sadomasochism theory while holding onto some orthodox psychoanalytic assumptions. Some psychoanalytic theorists began addressing social and political factors that contributed to new conceptualizations of sadomasochism. At the same time, other intra-psychic psychoanalytic theorists took a pre-oedipal approach to explain sadomasochism in the personality. During this post-Freudian phase of psychoanalytic theorizing on sadomasochism, Erich Fromm (1929/1984) began studying what he referred to as the “authoritarian-character” and was a keen critic of Freudian and post-Freudian theories (Fromm, 1932/1970). These and other aspects of Fromm’s influences will be explored in chapter 4 when Fromm’s path to his theory of sadomasochism is examined.

CHAPTER 3

Orthodox and Revisionist Psychoanalytic Theories on Sadomasochism

Introduction

As indicated at the end of chapter 2, Freud's investigation of moral masochism in "The Economic Problem of Masochism" (Freud, 1924/1962e, pp. 159-170) clearly loosened the concept of sadomasochism in his mind away from a strict sexual foundation. Yet, Freud's call for an expanded view of sexuality did surprisingly little to encourage other theories that displaced the importance of sexuality. Freud's death instinct drew criticism as "the crucial metapsychological basis for masochism" (Glick and Meyers, 1988, p. 8). Some theorists, like Wilhelm Reich considered historical and social factors as a legitimate basis for a new theory of sadomasochism from a psychoanalytic perspective. Other psychoanalytic thinkers, like Melanie Klein stayed with an intra-psychic theory of sadomasochism that stressed psychobiological drives during the pre-Oedipal phase of development. In this chapter, I will be taking a look at the post-Freudian views of Reich and Klein along with other cultural and interpersonal theorists of sadomasochism. We will also be taking a look at the unique psychobiological theory of Ian Suttie (*The Origins of Love and Hate*, 1935) who used the concept of love along with the insights of Freudian psychology to explain healthy personality development and perversions of character.

Section A: Cultural and Interpersonal Theories

The Influence of Socio-Cultural Change on Sadoomasochism Theories

During the 1920s, Europe was in the midst of a new international conflict that was heading towards another world war. The stock market crashed at the end of the decade, sending global economic conditions into a tailspin. Phillip Cushman (1995) explains:

World War I called into serious question the belief structure of Victorian bourgeois society, a process culminating in the emergence of what is now called the post-modern era. It ended an unquestioned, total acceptance of the value of personal restraint; the exercise of logic and reason; the natural efficiency of the upper classes to rule the nations; the commitment to hard work, gainful employment, and delay of gratification as ends in themselves; the “gentlemanly” patriarchal virtues of sportsmanship, fair play, and silent suffering; the particular types of constraints, deprivations and oppressions visited upon women. . . . All of these values and many more were shaken—perhaps even obliterated—by the senseless horror, waste and devastation of the war. (p.164)

As Cushman’s description of the unsettling mood that was spreading across Europe between two world wars was creating a new era of cultural angst, theorists were left with many questions; some turned to psychoanalysis for answers to these questions. Psychoanalytic principles and frameworks were increasingly applied to all forms of human endeavor, including childhood development, market research, vocational assessment, diagnostic testing, political psychology, and more. Shifts in

psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism and other psychopathologies reflected these changes as well. Theorists like Wilhelm Reich, Harry Stack Sullivan, and Karen Horney helped to shed light on the influence of social and interpersonal factors on the psychology of human behavior in general and in sadomasochistic tendencies in particular.

Wilhelm Reich

As one of the second generation of Freudian psychoanalysts, Wilhelm Reich became one of the most controversial figures in the early history of psychoanalysis. He was a political activist who attempted to create a bridge between psychoanalysis and Marxism. Reich was one of the first to address the negative cultural impact that the rise of fascism in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s had on individual psychopathology. Reich gained notoriety for vigorously challenging Freud's theory of the death instinct and his model of primary masochism, which led to a break with Freud and the psychoanalytic movement in 1934 (Robinson, 1970, p. 38). Reich's theory of sadomasochism emphasized the influence of cultural institutions, political ideology, and the structure of the family on individual pathology and was a radical departure for theories of sadomasochism in the field of psychoanalysis.

Reich's Early Days

Before Reich became known as a political activist and theorist he was known for his vitality and brilliance as a psychoanalyst and as an early follower of Freud (Robinson, 1970, p. 52; Sharaf, 1983, p. 59). Reich joined the Vienna psychoanalytic circle in 1919 and was esteemed for his skill in treating

challenging and difficult clients. Reich was effective in recognizing and dealing with what was referred to as “negative transference” in the more aggressive and sadistic personalities. His work on negative transference was praised by Freud (Sharaf, 1983, p. 85; Liebert, 1988, p. 32).

Reich conducted one of the first studies on sadomasochism in a clinical setting titled “Two Narcissistic Types” (Reich, 1922/1975, pp. 133-142). His study looked at sadomasochistic traits as a component of personality organization. In that study, Reich examined two forms of narcissism that exhibited sadomasochistic dynamics (p. 140). In the first type of narcissism, Reich referred to a “simple-symptom” neurosis depicted as a “latent sadism, [with] manifest masochism” (p. 140).⁵⁰ The second type of narcissism Reich explored was referred to as a neurotic character formation that exhibited a more serious and pervasive kind of sadomasochistic defense structure with strong sadistic qualities. As Reich stated, “contrary to the manifest masochistic disposition of the first type, the latter often shows sadistic traits”(p. 139).⁵¹ Reich’s investigations of narcissism constitute the first psychoanalytic attempt to make a significant “transition to a broader study of the [sadomasochistic] personality” (Sharaf, 1983, p. 67) that extended beyond the individual. In a second study, “The Impulsive Character: A Psychoanalytic Study of Ego Pathology” (1925/1974), Reich also made further distinctions between neurotic

⁵⁰ Reich’s simple-symptom neurosis was very similar to the neurotic type of sadomasochism that Freud identified as a normal character perversion produced by the Oedipal complex in “A Child is Being Beaten” (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 179-204).

⁵¹ Reich’s early investigations of the narcissistic personality structure pre-figures Otto Kernberg’s (1991, 1992) more recent explorations of mild sadomasochistic personality dynamics and severe sadomasochistic characterological disorders (see Kernberg, 1992, p. 151).

types and severe characterological pathologies based on sadomasochistic dynamics.

Reich considered socio-economic class and the types of family structure (i.e. patriarchal and matriarchal) to be primary influences in the formation of individual sadomasochistic personality expressions. Reich's examination of socio-economic and family dynamics were later woven into a broader cultural critique of Nazi Germany in *The mass psychology of fascism* (Reich, 1933/1970).

Although his work on the sadomasochistic personality and its neurotic forms represented an important blending of psychoanalytic thought and Marxist social theory that was unlike any theory of sadomasochism before him (Coen, 1988, p. 53), Reich was nonetheless rejected by psychoanalysts and Marxists alike.

Today, Reich's work on sadomasochism is generally ignored by psychoanalysts.⁵² Reich's work on "character armor" for masochism was the first psychoanalytic examination of sadomasochistic dynamics to incorporate a dialectical perspective of the individual and culture and it warrants recognition.

Reich's Rejection of the Death Instinct and Primary Masochism

Reich's rejection of the death instinct in *Character-analysis* (Reich, 1933/1948) offered what he called a "sex-economic clarification to the problem of masochism," as an alternative to Freud's theory (p.209). As Reich saw it, the true source of

⁵² Reich's contributions to sadomasochism theory continue to be ignored in contemporary psychoanalytic theory on sadomasochism. Benjamin (1988), a contemporary feminist-psychoanalytic-theorist of sadomasochism does cite Reich's work on social authority and repression. De Masi, (2003) a more current clinically minded psychoanalytic theorist of sadomasochism completely ignores Reich in his review of psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism.

masochism is the frustration of the genital sex drive combined with the fear of punishment from a “sex-negating” culture. Reich (1933/1948) wrote:

The suffering [of masochism] is ...a mechanism of protection against genital castration; [its] self-damaging acts are the anticipation of milder punishments as a protection against the punishment, which is really feared... The original ...neurosis develops from a conflict between [the genital] sexual drive and fear of actual punishment at the hands of an authoritarian society. (p. 290)

One can see from Reich’s above description of a genital sex drive that he held onto a version of Freud’s early conceptualization of a primary sexual libido to explain sadomasochism. At the same time, Reich was the first to shift the focus away from a purely intra-psychic theory to explain sadomasochism and take a dialectical approach that stressed the relationship between the individual psyche and the culture. Reich made the connection “between sexual repression and the authoritarian social order” (Robinson, 1970, p. 50) thereby calling attention to the idea that inner moral conflict and suffering can be a function of repressive pressure imposed by the social environment. Reich rejected the idea implied by Freud’s death instinct that the individual is constitutionally self-destructive.⁵³

Reich’s Contribution to Sadomasochism Theory

Reich’s theory of masochism in *Character-Analysis* (1933/1948) can be viewed as a socio-political psychoanalytic theory for sadomasochism. In

⁵³ Credit is due to Reich for advocating a positive view of the human subject at a time when sadomasochism theory under the sovereignty of the death instinct depicted the human subject as passive and without any sense of agency.

crafting his own theory of sadomasochism, Reich rejected Freud's emphasis on the centrality of the Oedipus complex and the death instinct. Perhaps, his most important contribution came from his dissatisfaction with Freud's concept of genital potency. Freud did not explore genital potency beyond the point of the male being able to perform the sexual act of intercourse successfully. Reich raised the notion of quality with respect to genital sexuality and took it to the level of the symbolic (Fromm, 1970/1992, p. 88). According to Reich, the genital body is more than sexual organs that are instruments to produce children. He viewed the body as a vehicle that can experience ecstatic joy and provide freedom in the world. Reich's concept of genital potency "exploded [Freud's concept]... of the unpleasure-pleasure principle and entailed instead the response of the non-repressed, non-defensive personality, of the total life-affirming and life-enjoying, free human being" (Fromm, 1970/1992b, p. 88). Reich's re-working of Freud's concept of genital potency is significant for the history of sadomasochism because it opened up the theory of sadomasochism to a dialectical notion between the organic pleasure seeking of the individual and the repressive features of culture that can interfere with individual satisfaction in life.

Reich's critique of authoritarian social structures and its sadistic impulses were a turning point in psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism. Reich raised a needed awareness on the importance of negative (authoritarian) cultural influences and their impact on the sadomasochistic pathology of the individual. In *The mass psychology of fascism* (Reich, 1933/1970), Reich identified instances of sadistic

practices in the “sex-negating culture” of youth movements in Nazi Germany. He indicted fascist culture for interfering -- in the name of “comradeship,” “honor,” and “voluntary discipline” (p.192) -- with the healthy genital sexual expression of its citizens; but really, Reich was aiming his critique beyond the immediate social ills of Nazism.

Reich’s radical psychoanalytic-Marxist vision held that the sadomasochistic impact of a sex-negating culture could be transformed through the deconstruction of all authoritarian family structures (Robinson, 1970, p. 49). He referred to patriarchal family structures as “a *factory for authoritarian ideologies* and conservative structures”(Reich, 1930/1945, p. 72), which inevitably leads to sadomasochistic practices of exploitation and domination on a broader social scale. Reich buttressed his attack on patriarchal societies with an anthropological argument, part of which is quoted below from *The mass psychology of fascism* (Reich, 1933/1970). Reich wrote:

The patriarchal authoritarian sexual order that resulted from the revolutionary process of latter-day matriarchy . . . becomes the primary basis of authoritarian ideology by depriving the women, children and adolescents of their sexual freedom, making a commodity of sex and placing sexual interests in the service of economic subjugation. From now on, sexuality is indeed distorted; it becomes diabolical and demonic and has to be curbed. In terms of patriarchal demands, the innocent sensuousness of matriarchy appears as the lascivious unchaining of dark powers. (p. 88)

One gets a sense of Reich's social from the above passage. He viewed all patriarchal authoritarian structures as inherently oppressive, claiming that using "economic exploitation and political domination to create the submissive character structures that supported...[those] institutions" (p. 51). Moreover, only matriarchal familial organizations are seen as "nurturing cultures" where the "sexual misery of youth is unknown" (Robinson, 1970, p. 51).⁵⁴ In essence, Reich was asserting that patriarchal culture is the original source of sadistic aggression that leads to masochistic and sadomasochistic pathology for the individual. In addition, he further proposed matriarchal culture as a cultural therapeutic solution for that condition. Reich's transformation of the sadomasochistic complex into a cultural analytic tool, in contrast to Freud's intra-psychic drive theory of sadomasochism, suggested that:

Human suffering was not due to an unalterable "biological will to suffer," to a "death instinct," but to the disastrous effect of *social* conditions on the biopsychic apparatus [*sic*]. This entailed the necessity of criticizing the social conditions which created the neuroses— a necessity which the hypothesis of a biological will to suffer had circumvented. (Wolfe, 1933/1970, pp. 209-210)

Reich inspired a new generation of cultural critics who looked at the pathological elements of society from the perspective of its impact on human character. The theories of Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, and R.D. Laing are

⁵⁴ Reich cited the theories of L.H. Morgan, Frederick Engels, and Bronislaw Malinowski to support his claims. Also, Reich (1933/1970) believed that the new communist Soviet Union was the best example of a sex-affirming matriarchal system that was "a society without state and without class" (p. 51). Later, as Stalin assumed dictatorial power, he recanted this claim (p. 297).

all indebted to Reich's break with orthodox psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism that ignored the impact of culture. Erich Fromm (1941) in particular owes much of his critique in *Escape from freedom* to Reich: "The parallels are simply too striking to be fortuitous. Like Fromm, Reich described the psychological foundations of Nazism as an ambiguous relationship to authority characteristic of the German lower middle classes"(Robinson, 1969, pp. 46-47).

The Limitations of Reich's Approach

Although Reich's conceptualization of sadomasochism was dynamic in that it served as a useful analytic tool to assess the subjugating features of a repressive culture on the individual psyche, his notion of the genital libido theory can be described as scientistic, privileging sexuality (albeit a more expanded notion of genital sexuality) as the root individual disturbance that was involved in sadomasochistic conflict. In this sense, Reich's genital libido theory was even more restrictive than Freud's sexually aggressive libido and his dual instinct theory.⁵⁵ Moreover, as a cultural historian, Reich's critique is often flat and lacks complexity. His tendency was to dichotomize matriarchal and patriarchal cultures into good and evil systems respectively. In the passage below, the psychoanalytic historian Paul Robinson (1970) discusses the flaws in Reich's analysis of culture:

Instead of pursuing a careful historical analysis of different family structures and child-rearing practices, Reich simply reduced all history to two basic

⁵⁵ As time went on, Reich tragically lost himself in a fantastical bio-physical theory about the "Orgon" to explain his genital notion of sexuality for which he was dismissed by his contemporaries. As a result, Reich's earlier humanistic sentiments which are part of his theories have been dismissed if not forgotten (see Fromm, 1970/1992b, pp. 87-89)

family types: permissive matriarchy and authoritarian patriarchy. There was only one important watershed in human history, that of separating the age of matriarchy from the age of patriarchy (circa 4000 B.C.). . . .Likewise, there were only two character structures of historical importance: the genital character of matriarchal society, capable of genuine self-determination, and the neurotic character of patriarchal society, whose basic political posture was submissiveness. (p. 49)

As Robinson explains, Reich's analysis was one-sided. He viewed culture as the only entity that engenders sadomasochistic behavior. Reich's depiction of the subject as a helpless victim caught in the throes of sadistic cultural forces who passively internalizes masochistic tendencies can be viewed as incomplete and overly simplistic. Instead of developing an informative analytic tool that could be used to illuminate cultural oppression and enlist others to engage in constructive therapeutic measures, Reich's moralistic and shallow cultural assessment called for social reform in an incendiary and polemical way that was rejected by Marxists and psychoanalysts alike. Though he raised important questions and pointed out real sources of cultural oppression, over time, Reich's call for social change appears naïve, irresponsible, and ineffective.

Reich's contribution towards the advancement of sadomasochism theory was that he was the first psychoanalytic theorist to call attention to the dialectical relationship between individual and culture. At a time when theories of sadomasochism were headed in the direction of maintaining sadomasochism as

an individualized clinical pathology without any connection to broader social issues, Reich and a handful of left-minded psychoanalytic thinkers forged a new path for sadomasochism theory. Reich was instrumental in raising the consciousness of theorists to the importance of cultural factors and he examined the implications of sadomasochism in a broader human context than had been considered previously.

Harry Stack Sullivan

Sullivan was not a psychoanalyst. His text, *Interpersonal psychiatry* (Sullivan, 1953) focused on the interpersonal needs other than sex which motivate human behavior and interaction. Sullivan's interpersonal model was an alternative to Freudian psychoanalysis (Cushman, 1995, p.174) and it addressed sadomasochistic dynamics from a people-to-people perspective which is considered the primary location for all human behavior. Rather than stress intrapsychic theories of masochism that privileged sexual motives, Sullivan (1953) concentrated on the interpersonal exchanges of power and submission that characterized masochistic behavior *between* people on an everyday basis. In his own words:

There is a large number of people who appear to go to rather extraordinary lengths to get themselves imposed on, abused, humiliated, and what not, but as you get further data, you discover that this quite often pays—in other words, they get things they want. And the things that everybody wants are satisfaction and security from anxiety. Thus these people who get

themselves abused and so on are indirectly getting other people involved in doing something useful in exchange. (p.353)

As shown above, Sullivan focused on security needs as opposed to sexuality to explain sadomasochistic behavior.

Sullivan understood sadomasochistic dynamics as *direct* and *indirect* modes of exploitation. As problematic modes of human interaction intensify, there is a release of pent-up anxiety, a fostering of low self-esteem, and an increase in further conflicts between persons (Cushman, 1995, p. 160). Sullivan (1953) created his own "hermeneutics of suspicion" ⁵⁶ regarding interpersonal oppression. He believed that hatred (which can be expressed in sadistic terms) are derivatives of anxiety which are "channeled in interpersonal relations, in a number of ways which are not perfectly obvious" (p. 351). Below is a sample of his depiction of the complexities of dominating and submissive tactics:

What happens is that a person who has a low opinion of himself develops a relatively suave way of manifesting, if not inferiority to significant people, at least such blatant hints of inferiority that he becomes more or less an object of philanthropic concern on the part of the other person. . . . [These] situations are apt to be somewhat unpleasant and complex for the other people involved—particularly if the other people are prone to find

⁵⁶ Ricoeur (1970) defines hermeneutics as "the theory of the rules that preside over the interpretation of a particular text" (p. 8). Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud are considered the first hermeneuticists of suspicion because of their "common opposition to a phenomenology of the sacred...within a single method of demystification" (p. 32). Sullivan followed in the tradition of Freud but used a method based on the notion of interpersonal anxiety (as opposed to the libido) to demystify human oppression (or sadomasochism).

themselves in relationships in which domineering and vassalizing their fellows is the source of their security. (p. 352)

As can be seen, Sullivan looked at the implications of the dynamics of domination and submission from both sides of an interpersonal exchange and did not privilege sexuality as a motive for any of these traits. Moreover, unlike Freud who located all psychic ills within the individual psyche, Sullivan believed social ills were socio-historically determined and develop from external restraints in the interpersonal environment. Sullivan was not a theorist of sadomasochism in the same way that other psychoanalysts were. He did not generally make direct references to sadomasochism. Nonetheless, his concept of *the exploitative attitudes* (pp. 351-353) is relevant as a “holistic” approach to understanding sadomasochism because it focuses on the themes of dominance and submission in interpersonal relations that are not sexually driven.⁵⁷

Karen Horney

Karen Horney belongs in the same group as Sullivan and Fromm in that all three rejected key Freudian concepts such as the primacy of sexuality as the impetus behind sadomasochistic behavior. Horney’s concepts are consistent with “those of individual psychology while keeping psychoanalytic terminology” (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 638). Her theories focused on anxiety and the neurotic aspects of behavior but in contrast with Freud, she did not see anxiety as inevitable and emphasized social and cultural factors rather than biological causes. She also was one of the first “to oppose Freud and speak directly to the issue of

⁵⁷ Sullivan was an important influence on Erich Fromm’s (1941) thinking about love and sadomasochistic relationships as will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

feminine psychology” (Engler, 2003, chap. 5). “Horney called Freud to task not only for his association of women with masochism but also for his theory of penis envy, both of which she convincingly argued stem from social conditions rather than biological inevitability” (Chancer, 1992, p. 127). The conflict created by her differences with Freud caused Horney to fall into great disfavor within psychoanalytic circles (Cushman, 1995, p. 176).

Horney (1937) talked about the "strategic value of suffering" and the addictive qualities of the masochistic experience (p. 265).⁵⁸ Her pithy and insightful exploration of the “domineering” neurotic type is a practical and lucid characterization of sadomasochistic dynamics that avoids the dogma of a sexualized libido or a bio-scientistic theorization. Horney took an approach to sadomasochism that allowed for an understanding of its everyday dynamics and “appear[s] surprisingly contemporary, almost commonsensical today” (Cushman, 1995, p. 176). To illustrate, Horney (1937) states:

The domineering characteristic of the neurotic striving for power...may be disguised in socially valuable or humanistic forms ... the other persons...will feel it and react with either submissiveness or with opposition. The neurotic ...maintains his belief that he is essentially a gentle soul who is annoyed only because people are so ill advised to oppose him.

A further peculiarity resulting from the compulsion to domineer is the person’s incapacity to have any fifty-fifty relationships. He either has to lead

⁵⁸ Meltzer (as cited in DeMasi, 2003, pp. 66-67) is a current post-analytic sadomasochism/perversion theorist who uses a model of addiction and narcissistic personality organization that can be traced back to Horney’s meditations on the addictive aspects of suffering.

or feels entirely lost, dependent and helpless. He is so autocratic that everything falling short of complete domination is felt as subjugation.

(pp. 174-175)

As described above, Horney's "domineering" neurotic type shows how the sadomasochistic idea was finding its way outside a classic psychoanalytic libidinal theoretical framework. Horney's portrayal of complex intrapsychic, interpersonal, and social factors was rendered practical and intelligible for her readers. She depicted everyday sadomasochism without reference to pathological models or based on the "rules" of physics and/or biology. Horney's emphasis on culture and personality avoided the idea of biological inevitability (Engler, 2003, p. 139; Chancer, 1992, p. 127). She held an optimistic view of human nature that stands apart from other sadomasochism theorists.⁵⁹

The cultural theorists of sadomasochism like Reich, Sullivan, and Horney can all be considered neo-psychoanalytic theorists of sadomasochism (see Ellenberger, 1970, p. 638). Their theories were in opposition to the orthodox *zeitgeist* of the years between the two world wars when notions of consumerism and individual pathologies reigned hegemonous in psychoanalytic thought (Cushman, 1995, p. 209). As will be explored next, the two other key neo-psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism remained within an intrapsychic framework.

⁵⁹ Erich Fromm (1941) incorporated Horney's observations of the "masochistic strivings in the neurotic personality" and her depiction of sadomasochistic dynamics that lead to dependency on others (p. 149).

Section B: Neo-Psychoanalytic Sadomasochism Theories

Theodor Reik

Theodor Reik (1941) was a first generation Freudian psychoanalyst who enjoyed recognition as a novelist and was interested in “the phenomenological world of masochism” (p. 39). Reik’s exploration of the dimensions of masochism is generally disregarded in the history of sadomasochism theories.⁶⁰ Yet, his focus on the centrality of the imagination at the core of masochism and his phenomenological rule of description⁶¹ is reminiscent of Krafft-Ebing’s original findings on masochism that were taken from Sacher-Masoch. As the libido theory gained ground in sadomasochism theory, the key role of imagination began to fade in importance. However, as Reik (1941) stated in *Masochism in modern man*:

The importance of the phantasy as the very essence of masochism has not yet been appreciated in analytical theories, that its indispensability has not yet been recognized. Imagination, thus neglected, has taken its revenge nevertheless. It penetrated the theories of some analysts and made them so fanciful. (p. 58)

Reik’s observations showed that the imaginative core of masochism has an intentionally sadistic origin. As he stated, “The masochist uses all possible means at his disposal to induce his partner to create for him that discomfort which he needs for attaining his pleasure” (p. 84). He emphasized the subjective and aggressive nature of imagination at the core of sexual masochism and for non-

⁶⁰ Reik is overlooked in Franco De Masi’s (2003) contemporary psychoanalytic review of sadomasochism theories.

⁶¹ The phenomenological method of observation was discussed in chapter 1

sexual (characterological) masochism as well. An example of Reik's descriptive approach is excerpted below in his depiction of social masochism. He wrote:

In most cases it has the character of a performance and frequently it does not dispense with a certain theatrical flavor. This demonstrative note is not restricted to masochistic individuals. It can be rediscovered in the attitude of groups or peoples to whom fate has ordained an afflicted past and present. In the lives of these peoples the connection between the ideas of being loved and of being punished reappears on a higher, frequently on a religious, level. However genuine the penitence, however voluntary the suffering, it can't do without a public. "God loves him whom he chastens." (pp. 78-79)

In this passage, Reik seems to have captured an important intentional "*folie à deux*" quality to social masochism that implies dependence on another person (or persons) to achieve its aim. Reik's description of social masochism as shown above expands the boundaries of social masochism as an individually sexually motivated act. It is revealed as a universal experience which is applicable in multiple contexts and involves a shared imagination ("*folie à millions*").⁶²

Unfortunately, Reik showed little theoretical imagination elsewhere when discussing masochism. He clung to a murky version of Freud's libido theory though he did reject the death instinct.

⁶² Reik's early descriptions of group social masochism may offer some insights into the contemporary mindset of those who commit sadistic acts of terror and order to avoid the wrath of a stern and vengeful God.

Melanie Klein's Object-Relations Theory of Sadomasochism

Melanie Klein's formidable impact on sadomasochism theory is not well known within psychoanalytic circles in the United States (DeMasi, 2003, ch. 8).⁶³ Klein was however, one of the first to challenge Freud's structural theory of character development, developing her own theory of personality based on the prevalence of *pre-Oedipal* unconscious fantasies. Klein (1946/1975) proposed two fundamental personality orientations: the "paranoid-schizoid position" and "the depressive position" (p. 14) which she described as "anxieties, mechanisms and defenses which are characteristic of the first few months of life" (p. 14). She argued that incestuous fantasies of union (i.e., the Oedipal complex) and terrifying forms of self-punishment (i.e., the superego) "are present from a very young age, although in more 'primitive,' frightening forms," and specifically targeted "pre-genital stage oedipal conflicts" (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p. 87). Klein highlighted intense primitive forms of sadistic rage during the pre-Oedipal stage "that . . . [are] chiefly impulses of hate, which initiate the Oedipus conflict and the formation of the super-ego and which govern the earliest and most decisive stages of both" (Klein, 1932/1975, p. 135). She bolstered her claim regarding the primacy of pre-Oedipal hatred and aggression by quoting Freud's own statements on the subject. In "Instinct and Their Vicissitudes" (Freud, 1915/1962g, pp. 109-140), Freud wrote that "hate as a relation to objects, is older than love" (p. 139). Klein maintained that terror, hate, and rage are discernible in

⁶³ Stephen Mitchell (1995) considers Melanie Klein to have had the greatest impact on contemporary psychoanalytic thought since Freud (p. 85). At the same time, it is only recently that her ideas have begun to find an audience in the United States, as they were virtually ignored for years "on the grounds that her descriptions of the early mental life of the infant were too 'fanciful' " (Fine, 1979, p. 281).

the child's earliest fantasies and can be interpreted psychoanalytically. The prototypical example is the childhood masturbation fantasy, which Klein recorded in *The psycho-analysis of children* (1932/1975) and depicted the fantasy in sadomasochistic terms.

As can be seen below, Klein (1932/1975) developed a topographical outline of the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position which provide the structure for interpreting sadomasochistic rage in the masturbation fantasies of a child:

According to my observation, the child's masturbation phantasies have as their nucleus *early sadistic phantasies centered upon its parents' copulation. It is those destructive impulses, fused with libidinal ones*, which cause the super-ego to put up defenses against masturbation phantasies and, incidentally, against masturbation itself. . . . If this is so, then not only would it be the incestuous trends which give rise in the first instance to a sense of guilt, but horror of incest itself would ultimately be derived from the destructive impulses which are bound up permanently in the child's earliest incestuous desires. (p.134)

In this instinctual drama of sex and aggression, the child is caught in a whirlwind of sadistic rage mixed with a horrific terror at the sight of copulation of the parents. In the first half of this fantasy, which describes the paranoid-schizoid position, primitive destructive impulses are bound to incestuous desires. The subsequent guilt and horror stage -- leading to super-ego restraint and suppression of masturbatory behavior -- can further lead to withdrawal and

despondency, which Klein refers to as the depressive position. Both the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions are universal psychobiological entities (Liebert, 1988, p. 33). The child goes through a process of externalization (projection of sadistic rage onto parental objects) and a re-internalization (i.e., integration) of those objects with attached affects as a part of normal growth and emotional development. Sadomasochism in adulthood refers to the unachieved re-internalization by the infant of the two basic psychic positions in relation to the mother-object during this crucial pre-Oedipal time. According to Klein, if the process leading to re-internalization is disrupted, then psychical chaos emerges because the ego is not solidified and pathology develops.⁶⁴

Klein contended that the primitive sadistic rage found in the fantasies of children are analogous to adult criminal and psychotic forms of sadistic rage. In *A contribution to the psychogenesis of manic-depressive states* (1935/1948), she explained:

In the very first months of the baby's existence it has sadistic impulses directed, not only against its mother's breast, but also against the inside of her body: scooping it out, devouring the contents, destroying it by every means which sadism can suggest ... But it is because the baby projects its own aggression onto these objects that it feels them to be "bad" and not only because they frustrate its desires; the child conceives them as actually

⁶⁴ Klein's theory is used to explain the contemporary addictive model of sadomasochism. Pleasure commingles with destructive rage in the adult when the intense affects attached to parental objects are not successfully re-internalized during childhood (see Demasi, 2003, pp.66-67).

dangerous. . . . (and react to them with defence-mechanisms), the content of which is comparable to that of the psychoses of adults. (p. 282)

Although Klein never investigated the implications of her theory beyond asserting its relevance to criminality and psychotic behavior as she mentions in the above passage, she did inspire others to carry her work further (DeMasi, 2003, p. 66). W. Bion (1957) is perhaps the most notable post-Kleinian to conduct studies on the personality development of adult psychotic criminals using the object-relational paradigm for sadomasochistic rage (p. 269).

Klein's theory follows the same pattern set by Freud as it pertains to the development of the sadomasochistic character. It presents "two drives [which] are opposed to each other and the development of the mind centers on the innate conflict between destructiveness and libido" (De Masi, 2003, p. 66). Klein depicts the sadomasochistic child as a "perverse patient...split into two non-communicating parts struggling to dominate the personality: the perverse part, interested in domination and sadism, tends to prevail over the healthy part" (p. 66). Like Freud, Klein's penchant for polarities and conflict is central to her theory of sadomasochism. However, Instead of situating the sadomasochistic fantasy and its resolution in the idea of father-dominated Oedipal dynamics, she took the point of view that "the form of the resolution of two fundamental psychic positions is in relation to the mother" (Liebert, 1988, p. 33). Klein also did not change the essential binaristic notion of the conflict between a repressive ego and innate sexual aggression; she merely inserted the intrapsychic "dialectic of control" (Benajamin, 1988, p. 53) into an earlier time on the continuum of psychosexual

development. Moreover, Klein did not deviate from the idea that all sadomasochism is a function of innate tendencies that are activated through the sexualized child-parent dynamics.⁶⁵ Klein's psycho-biological assumptions about destruction and the primitive aggression of childhood drives were a radical departure from Freud's Oedipal explanation of sadomasochism as a neurotic normal perversion of childhood (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 179-204). Klein's model was more discursive on the psychotic features of normal and abnormal sadomasochistic sexuality. Like Freud, Klein hypothesized her theory from clinical observations with a method that is more intuitive than empirical. Her theory of sadomasochism however, can be viewed as the more radical one because of its psycho-biological assumptions about open and dramatic expressions of destruction and aggression at an earlier age in development.

One can criticize Klein's psychobiological "theories of an inborn death and of an inborn sexual knowledge. . .[as] incorrect" (Fine, 1979, p. 281). Even within a psychoanalytic framework, her excessive focus on primitive conflicts and mechanisms (i.e., *positions*) pre-empts other considerations, such as character development and defense mechanisms, in favor of deeper interpretations of symbolic unconscious fantasies (p. 282). Klein seems to assume an "innate badness of the child" (p. 282). In fact, her pessimistic view of the unconscious can

⁶⁵ The British object-relational school that followed Klein does "not inquire into the nature of sexuality in itself, but focuses on the object relationship and the constructive or destructive orientation of the personality and its internal objects" (DeMasi, 2003, p. 48).

be extended to “the adult as...[the unconscious] remains always unstable, fluid, constantly fending off anxieties” (Mitchell and Black, 1995, p. 87).⁶⁶

Klein’s theory of childhood sadomasochistic aggression goes back to Freud’s earliest polemical outline of love and hate, which can be found in “Instincts and their Vicissitudes” (Freud, 1915/1962g, p. 139). Klein seems to have used Freud’s first teleological narrative of the antithesis between love and hate as a psychological law of the unconscious upon which to ground her whole theory of mental development (Grosskurth, 1986, p. 175).⁶⁷

Klein also claimed to have relied upon Freud’s and Karl Abraham’s psychosexual stage theories to develop her own theory (see Abraham, 1916/1966b, pp. 35-66). Yet, from her definition of anxiety “as originating from the presence and danger of the death instinct within the self,” it is clear that Klein struck out on her own with instinct theory (Grosskurth, 1986, p. 191). Despite all her use of Freudian concepts, and the fact that she applied Freudian dynamics to early pre-Oedipal stages, it would be a mistake to interpret Klein as merely extending Freud’s view. Klein paid little real attention to biology (though she made biological claims) and she did not use hypothetical deductive reasoning to assert her claims as Freud did. Her theory of anxiety and sadomasochism was anchored on the death instinct but relied on her own intuition and clinical observation.

⁶⁶There are mixed reviews about Klein’s pessimism. Phyllis Grosskurth,(1986), one of Klein’s biographers, describes Klein’s theories as “always governed by her preoccupation with the origins of anxiety and guilt” (p. 338). Others have praised Klein for disposing of “the determinism and fatalism implicit in some aspects of Freud’s speculation, [while] confront[ing] the vicissitudes of the destructive drive in the field of primitive development” (DeMasi, 2003, pp. 65-66).

⁶⁷ It is worth recalling that Freud was preoccupied with the idea of love (and hate) and had a tendency to continually revise himself on this matter. (see Chapter 2, Sect. B, pp. 61-62)

Although the Kleinian model of sadomasochism makes some striking correlations between abnormal pre-Oedipal conflicts from childhood and the processes of criminality and psychotic behavior in adults (Klein, 1946/1975; Bion, 1957) which are useful, Klein presents a dark and frightening portrayal of human sexuality and parent-child dynamics that are horrific and pathological. Klein developed her theories from working with “children, many of [whom were]...extremely disturbed and terrified” (Mitchell & Black, 1995, p. 87) and this is exactly what is reflected in her theories. One has to wonder however, if Klein’s fantasy-drama of pre-Oedipal (sadistic) rage dynamics presents a balanced picture of psychosexual development. Her theory of sadomasochism goes beyond even the typical hermeneutics of suspicion approach that is reflected in most psychoanalytic theories during her era. Her emphasis was strictly on the instability and overwhelming aspects of psychic life to explain the formation of sadomasochism while ignoring the more life affirming uses of defense mechanisms to protect ego-integration. As we will see next, there was an alternative to Klein’s hermeneutics of suspicion approach to depict sadomasochism that stands in contrast to most psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism during the early post-Freudian analytic phase.

Ian Suttie’s Theory of Love

Ian Suttie’s (1935) theory of love offered a more sanguine view of pre-genital mother-child object relational dynamics than seen by either Klein or Freud. In “A Scientific Conception of Love, Hate and Interest” (Suttie, 1935, chap. 2), Suttie presents a well-reasoned and empirically conscious biological thesis for the idea

that the love of the mother is the primal need of the infant. Hate, according to Suttie, is a consequence that occurs when love is threatened or interfered with (p. 31). Furthermore, Suttie viewed sexual gratification as a secondary need to the primary need for protection which goes along with the need of love and safety. The starting point of psychopathology according to Suttie is any interference with the organic development of love and security which are innate to the infant. An original thinker, Suttie cited and credited many of Freud's theories while pointing out some of the discrepancies and growing differences among the burgeoning schools of psychoanalytic thought, specifically on the development of children (see Suttie, 1935, p. 11). Suttie also noted that many of Freud's earlier concepts were abandoned by his later followers, such as the primacy of the Oedipal conflict to explain neurosis (p. 11).⁶⁸ Using the language of psychoanalysis very adroitly, Suttie devised a developmental theory on the origin of love for the infant that incorporated many Freudian insights and steered clear of the orthodox psychoanalytic tendency towards suspicion and reductionism. Suttie wrote that "the love of others comes into being simultaneously *with the recognition of their existence*, or, in Freudian language, the perceptions which are integrated as the first recognition of mother are "cathected" with love *from the very beginning* (p. 31). This quote suggests that the child's ability to affirm the mother's "existence" is the ground for the child's own sense of self-awareness; that is, according to Suttie, self-awareness

⁶⁸ As mentioned in chapter 2, Freud often left theories and concepts unexplained as he moved on to newer theories. Suttie's comments suggest that many analysts went along with Freud and left many of his earlier concepts behind as well.

appears indivisible from awareness of the other.⁶⁹ What is particularly noteworthy in Suttie's perspective is how the language of psychoanalysis and biology is used to communicate the idea of reciprocity between mother and child in an almost intersubjective way.⁷⁰ Suttie's view of psychopathology (i.e., sadomasochism) was that it is a consequence of any interference with the development of love. Suttie's work is remarkable given that the zeitgeist of personality theory during his era was dominated by Freudian psychosexual theory which stressed erogenous zone fixation and destructive instincts as the primary factors that explain psychic problems. Suttie clearly rejected Freud's death instinct theory (p. 30) and the Kleinian premise that hate and envy preceded love as the primary emotional instincts. According to Suttie:

Love of mother is primal in so far as it is the *first formed and directed* emotional relationship. Hate, I regard not as a primal independent instinct... but as a development or intensification of separation-anxiety which in turn is roused by a threat against love. ...Its purpose is not death-seeking or death-dealing, but the preservation of the self from the isolation which is death, and the restoration of a love relationship. (p. 31)

As explicated above, Suttie constructed hate as a defensive reaction to the loss of love which contrasted with Klein's position that hate as a primary instinct is responsible for rage. While the theories of Suttie and Klein did converge on the centrality of pre-oedipal object-relational dynamics between the infant and child,

⁶⁹ The notion of self/other mutuality and its central role that it plays in human love will become a key principle in Erich Fromm's theoretical approach to sadomasochism that will be explored in chapter 5

⁷⁰ Today, the intersubjective model has been integrated with psychoanalysis (i.e., Benjamin (1988 and Mitchell & Black, 1995)

their aims were quite different. For Suttie, the core loving relationship between mother and child eventually differentiates into curiosity and tenderness, which later unites itself with sex. For Klein, the mother—child relationship is sexualized from the very beginning. Suttie also differentiated his biological notion of love from Freudian instinct theory which defined love as “sexual desire degenerated (‘goal-inhibited’) by repression as Freud would have it” (Suttie, 1935, p. 31). As for the death instinct, Suttie considered it a “systematic error on Freud’s part traceable to definite bias” (p. 31).

As shown below in Suttie’s (1935) examination of Freud’s explanation of love, Suttie believed that Freud did not adequately explain the formation of love based on a concept of narcissism. Suttie claimed that while based on deductive reasoning, Freud’s explanation is derived from “inferior clinical work” (p. 37).

Suttie wrote:

So far as the term narcissism *describes* a form of behaviour or state of feeling it is very well chosen; but I do not consider that it represents an actual phase in the development of love. It seems to me that Freud has confused two things. Partly he has not thought out the implications of ...the appearance of self-love (though, even here, I hold that the rudiment of “other” -love is present).

What I find so unique about Suttie’s perspective that can be seen in his analysis of Freud’s work, is that Suttie maintains an inter-relational focus throughout all of discussion of mother-child dynamics. Instead of preferring individual pathological interpretations of self-awareness such as the narcissistic

pre-occupation with the body (see Freud, 1914/1962k, p. 73), Suttie consistently stressed the relational aspects of self awareness in child development and included the mother as an active “other” instrumental to the child’s growing body awareness . As Suttie continues below, we find him continuing to make the point that the center of a child’s self-love cannot be conceptualized in isolation (e.g., narcissism) as Freud would have it: ⁷¹

Partly he [Freud] has mistaken the *interest* the baby develops in its own body and immediate concerns under the attentions of the loved mother for an actual love-of-self. .

To begin with this state of affairs can hardly be distinguished from love itself (reciprocal absorption), but it acts as the nucleus and starting point of future *interest* -development or sublimation.

I thus regard the states of feeling and modes of behaviour which Freud conceives as Narcissism, not as an intermediary phase in the development of love as he thinks, but as an off-shoot of it. (p. 37)

If one follows Suttie’s argument in this passage, one is led to see the solipsism in Freud’s argument of primary narcissism. Suttie stayed clear of this problem by never losing sight of the maternal figure in pre-Oedipal dynamics, which Freud clearly minimized throughout his theory of psychosexual development. Perversion (i.e., sadomasochism) in Suttie’s framework was viewed as a consequence of interruption to the development of human love and the mother-infant bond. Suttie’s theory presented a significant departure from conventional sadomasochism theory

⁷¹Freud (1914/1962k) described the child’s narcissistic pre-occupation with the body on the level with the “significance of a perversion” (p. 73)

which stressed the primacy of sexual and/or death and destructive instincts to explain sadomasochistic outcomes. With Suttie, the conceptualization of love as a mutual reciprocal process served as the ideal norm from which to understand sadomasochism from.⁷²

Section C: Concluding Remarks on the Orthodox and Revisionist Era of Sadomasochism Theories

The socio-cultural perspective on sadomasochism theory temporarily gained ascendancy in psychoanalysis during the cultural rise of fascism and Nazi Germany but this quickly faded after World War II. Since then, the cultural zeitgeist within the psychoanalytic movement has continued to favor intra-psychic theories to explain sadomasochism, particularly in the United States.⁷³ One can find a few current theorists of sadomasochism from the psychoanalytic perspective who currently resonate with the social world views of Reich and Fromm (see Benjamin, 1988), but for the most part, the socio-cultural perspective on sadomasochism theory holds little weight among current psychoanalytic thinkers on the sadomasochistic perversion (see Demasi, 2003; Glick and Meyers, 1988).

Another psychoanalytic approach that emerged during this time was the ego psychoanalytic school which emerged at around the same time as Klein's object-relational psychoanalytic school. This approach continued to extend Freud's notion of normal sadomasochism based on his infantile psychosexual theory but

⁷²Erich Fromm (1956) would develop a similar foundation as a theory to explain sadomasochism as we will see later in Part II

⁷³Exceptions to this can be found in the developing field of Community Psychology where the cultural analysis of different forms of oppression is the main focus (see Prillentrsky & Nelson, 2005)

stressed his later work on the ego found in “The Ego and the Id” (Freud, 1923/1962f, pp. 19-27).⁷⁴ These theories emphasize the ego defense mechanisms as adaptive means to protect the integrity of the ego and thereby stress the defensive uses of sexuality to protect ego integrity as well. When compared with earlier psychoanalytic approaches and Klein’s object-relational theory of sadomasochism, the ego psychoanalytic approach is more positive or benign because the focus is not on the unconscious forces of the id (Fine, 1979, p. 293). Sadomasochism is looked at as a defensive reaction that protects ego or narcissistic injury.⁷⁵ All of the ego psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism were intrapsychic theories during the 1930’s. Later they developed into more relational psychoanalytic theories that stress identity as the core to the sadomasochistic perversion (DeMasi, 2003, p. 47).

There was one psychoanalyst during this era who began integrating a perspective on sadomasochism from a wide range of theories and insights from sociology, psychology, and his own clinical work that led to a new theoretical approach that began to take shape by the end of the 1930’s. Erich Fromm began the 1930’s with a series of original and sensitive critiques of Freudian psychoanalytic theory that eventually led him to call for a new theory of love (Fromm, 1939) to explain sadomasochism. In Part II of this dissertation, I will be following Fromm’s intellectual path and the theorists that influenced him most

⁷⁴The other article by Freud which was the forerunner to the ego psychoanalytic approach to sadomasochism is “On Narcissism” (Freud, 1914/1962k, pp. 73-102) (Fine, 1979, p. 293)

⁷⁵ The ego psychoanalytic school was the forerunner to the relational paradigm of psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism (DeMasi, 2003, chap. 8). Most of the theorists from the second paradigm were prominent later in the twentieth century (i.e., Winnicott, 1945; Kohut, 1971; Mahler, 1975)

significantly in crafting a radically different social-psychological theoretical outlook that opened up the sadomasochistic discourse to a socially broader and more human platform. As the 1930's came to a close Erich Fromm called for a theory of love that provided a whole new foundation from which to understand sadomasochism as a pervasive and everyday kind of destructive pleasure that is much more typical than was previously realized. Fromm would bring sadomasochism into the conversation of everyday life in a way that could have hardly been imagined by Krafft-Ebing and was not envisioned by even Freud. In Chapter 4, I will begin an examination of Erich Fromm's background interests and theoretical preoccupations that led him to call for a theory of love and an analysis of sadomasochistic pseudo-love which was the first step towards developing an alternate theory of sadomasochism that did not privilege sexuality.

PART TWO

CHAPTER 4

Setting the Stage for Erich Fromm's Theory of Sadomasochism

Introduction: Fromm's Background and Early Frankfurt Years

This chapter is a turning point in the history of sadomasochism away from psychoanalytic theories. Erich Fromm was a social-psychoanalytic thinker who began to critically examine some of Freud's key theories, especially Freud's emphasis on the primacy of sexual needs to explain human character development. Fromm's disagreements with Freud in the early 1930's were crucial in leading him to call for a theory of love and an analysis of sadomasochistic pseudo-love by the end of the decade. It was also during this time that Fromm became interested in the sadomasochistic personality type which he later termed the "authoritarian character" (Fromm, 1941, chap. V). In this chapter, after a brief review of Fromm's background and his first examination of the authoritarian character, I will be laying the groundwork for Fromm's existential-psychology that led to an original theoretical framework of sadomasochism.

Fromm's intellectual roots come from the nineteenth century tradition of *Geisteswissenschaften*, an approach to the study of culture and society "based on the broadest possible knowledge of life's manifestations...[that included the study of]... psychology, history, economics, philology, literary criticism, comparative religion, and jurisprudence" (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1967, p. 405). Fromm (1932/1970) devised an original social-psychoanalytic method that combined Freudian techniques with the ideas of Marx. He started with the premise that

“Freud never assumed isolated man, devoid of all social ties, to be the object of psychology” (p. 143); Fromm interpreted individual behavior in reference to the patient’s social context. For Fromm, the psychic life of the individual was indivisible from the social context of family, government institutions, and socio-economic cultural conditions (p. 143). His unique social-psychoanalytic perspective blended humanism and existential thought to address the complex questions of what motivates human behavior. As will be shown throughout this chapter, Fromm was able to accomplish a remarkable integration of socio-philosophical thought with various individual psychological perspectives.

In 1927, Fromm joined the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research where he conducted a ground-breaking study on the relationship between individual character and the political views of German workers. It was published under the title “The Working Class in Weimar Germany: a Psychological and Sociological Study” (Fromm, 1929/1984). This work was important because Fromm found strong sadomasochistic tendencies among the majority of German workers prior to Hitler’s rise in power. One might have predicted, as many of Fromm’s Marxist peers did, that the liberal German worker would have not been so compliant with Nazi authority, but this was not the case according to Fromm’s findings. Based on his findings, Fromm predicted Hitler’s rise to power (Burston, 1991, pp. 109-110). Fromm’s Marxist colleagues in the Frankfurt School objected and deplored the study because of its finding that the left-wing of the German socialist party was as likely to support the political demagoguery of Hitler as the conservative right-wing. Fromm left the Frankfurt group in 1938. His essay, “The Working Class in Weimar

Germany: a Psychological and Sociological Study" (Fromm, 1929/1984) was never published during his lifetime. The significant feature of this study in the history of theories on sadomasochism is the fact that Fromm developed a sadomasochistic personality profile called the "authoritarian-masochistic" character. His conceptualization presaged his later notion of the "authoritarian character" found in *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941).⁷⁶

In Section A, Fromm's major differences with Freud on the primacy of the sexual libido and his shift to a different kind of psychoanalytically-informed theory of the sadomasochistic character will be explored. In Section B, the contribution of other theorists on Fromm's thinking will be examined. I will be pointing out where Fromm's independence as a thinker shines forth and where he seems to integrate the ideas of others into his own social-psychological vision. Section C concentrates on Fromm's disagreements with Reich on the death instinct and its implications for differences on Fromm's theory of sadomasochism. Finally, in section E, Fromm's call for a theory of love and his existential analysis of Freud's notion of destructiveness will be examined. The chapter ends with noting the arrival of Sartre's *Being and nothingness* (1943/1956), which marks the beginning of a new era of existential-phenomenological thought on sadomasochism.

⁷⁶ Fromm's study of working class Germans foreshadowed his original approach to character development which he later developed in *Man for himself* (Fromm, 1947). Fromm's understanding of character is key to being able understanding Fromm's approach to sadomasochism theory.

Section A: Fromm's Differences with Freud

Fromm's De-centering of the Sexual Libido

Despite Fromm's personal admiration for Freud and his use of psychoanalysis as a method, he questioned several fundamental Freudian concepts regarding the unconscious. One concept he challenged was the primacy of the sexual libido in psychic life. Whereas Freud privileged the sexual libido as the ultimate source of motivation in the psyche (specifically in his first two theories for sadomasochism), Fromm stressed that the self-preservation instincts were primary and less malleable than the sexual libido. Fromm explains this clearly in "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology" (Fromm, 1932/1970, pp. 138-162):

In order to make as clear as possible that sex instincts can be modified and adapted to reality, we must point out certain characteristics which clearly distinguish them from the instincts for self-preservation. For example, unlike the instincts for self-preservation, the sex instincts are postponable...

...Furthermore, the drives toward self-preservation must be satisfied by real, concrete means, while the sex drives can often be satisfied by pure fantasies. A man's hunger can only be satisfied by food; his desire to be loved, however, can be satisfied by fantasies about a good and loving God, and his sadistic tendencies can be satisfied by sadistic spectacles and phantasies. (p. 140)

It is interesting to see in the above passage how Fromm is using his concept of the "desire to be loved" as interchangeable with Freud's idea of the sex drive. In fact, Fromm admitted that he did use an "instinctivist" framework during his early

critiques of Freud's libido theory, which he later recanted (see footnote p. 139). Nonetheless, it is evident from this initial critique that Fromm never privileged the idea of a pure sexual libido in the unconscious like Freud and other analysts did. As the critique shows, not only did Fromm minimize sexuality as the central drive for psychic life, he differentiated among the various components of sexuality. These include the desire to be loved and the sadistic urges, which are often attached to the sexual drive. Fromm seems to have broken down the concept of sexuality into more components and re-configured it as a malleable and "postponable" need secondary to the core life-sustaining needs within a broader context. As the passage shows, Fromm seems to have recognized the complexity and importance of sexuality without totalizing it as an abstract entity. Moreover, Fromm avoids overstating its need for gratification in comparison to other human needs:

Summing up, it can be said that the sexual instincts, which can be postponed, repressed, sublimated, and interchanged, are more elastic and flexible than the instincts for self-preservation. The former lean on the latter and follow their lead. The greater flexibility and changeability of the sex instincts does not mean that they can be left unsatisfied permanently; there is not only a physical but also a psychic minimal existence, and the sex instincts must be satisfied to some minimal extent. (p. 141)

Even before his existential revision of the human needs, Fromm advocated a de-centering of sex within a natural scientific framework. He did not take the

hierarchical view of Krafft-Ebing, Freud, and other sexologists.⁷⁷ Fromm was in actuality closer to the philosophy of Schopenhauer and E. von Hartmann conceiving the relationship between the sexual passions and the instincts of hunger and love, which Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) opposed (p. xxi). Fromm was not a philosopher and he had yet to develop a concept of love that he would later develop into a complete theory. Nevertheless, his refusal to privilege the sexual libido above the survival instincts during a time when it was not politically expedient to do so separated him from most of psychoanalytic contemporaries (Cushman, 1994, p. 159).

Examining the Philosophical Foundations of Freud's Theory

Although he did not identify himself as a philosopher, Fromm was explicitly attuned to the philosophical assumptions behind the psychological ideas that he appropriated. He specifically pointed to the philosophical premises underlying Freud's concept of the unconscious. While Fromm advocated Freud's dynamic approach to the interpretation of the unconscious, he was critical of Freud's scientific explanations that emanate from a materialist philosophical underpinning implicit in Freud's drive theory and metapsychology. In Fromm's (1970) words:

Freud was a student of von Brücke, a physiologist who was one of the most distinguished representatives of mechanistic materialism, especially in its German form. This type of materialism was based on the principle that all psychic phenomena have their roots in certain physiological processes and that they *can be sufficiently explained and understood* if one knows these

⁷⁷ For a definition of the natural scientific view and Krafft-Ebing's hierarchical view of the passions see page 3 of the Introduction.

roots. Freud, in search of the roots of psychic disturbances, had to look for a physiological substrate for the drives; to find this in sexuality was an ideal solution, since it corresponded both to the requirements of mechanistic-materialistic thought and to certain clinical findings in patients of his time and class. It remains, of course, uncertain whether those findings would have impressed Freud so deeply if he had not thought within the framework of his philosophy; but it can hardly be doubted that his philosophy was an important determinant of his theory of drives. This means that someone with a different philosophy will approach his findings with a certain skepticism. (p. 45)

By underscoring the philosophical foundations embedded in Freud's theories, Fromm demonstrated that Freud's conclusions were based on historically situated concepts that were not transhistorical biological facts.

As Roazen (2001) has noted, "Freud... got off on an unfortunate footing when he tried to divorce his work from philosophy itself... and [...] was repeatedly tempted to argue that he had unearthed facts, so called discoveries, which were provable" (p. 83). Freud's ambition to legitimize psychoanalysis on the basis of scientific concepts tended to obscure his use of intuition and philosophical speculation.⁷⁸ At the same time, Fromm (1932/1970) appreciated Freud's importance. He had great admiration for the founder of psychoanalysis, but he also understood Freud's limitations in regards to his insistence on intrapsychic models to explain complex social-psychological phenomena. This explains why Fromm continually pointed to Freud's use of philosophical speculation whenever

⁷⁸ Lewin (1937/1999) suggests it is more helpful to read Freud's method as an anthropological approach to human behavior that is successful in advancing the therapeutic aims of psychoanalysis (p. 67).

making new theoretical claims (p.138). While Fromm's critique of Freud never was intended to weaken Freud's influence, Fromm wished to point out that many of Freud's theories were not as conclusive from an empirical-scientific perspective as they were taken to be by most of Freud's followers. As Fromm (1973) later noted, most psychoanalysts who criticized Freud nonetheless continued to follow Freud's lead and the basic assumptions behind his theories (pp. 502-503). By contrast, Fromm's critique of the philosophical premises underlying Freud's theories suggested that the consideration of social context and of a theorist's own personal convictions are key elements in determining how to understand her or his theory for human behavior.

Fromm's Theory of Character Development

Along with his doubts concerning libido theory, Fromm (1934/1970) questioned Freud's belief that character traits were exclusively a function of erogenous zone fixation that follows an ontogenetic sequence (p. 128). Fromm (1970/1992) understood individual character as a "particular kind of relatedness...to the world outside" (p. 99) that is shaped by social and environmental demands of society. He argued that most members of a group or society share a common set of traits that Fromm called a "social character." In order to comprehend individual character structure, Fromm stressed the importance of studying the social character. As he said in *Escape From Freedom* (Fromm, 1941):

The character structure of most members of the group are variations of this nucleus [core traits], brought about by the accidental factors of birth and life

experience as they differ from one individual to another. If we want to understand one individual most fully, these differentiating elements are of the greatest importance. However, if we want to understand how human energy is channeled and operates as a productive force in a given social order, then the social character deserves our main interest. (p.276)

While there is a normative reference to the construction of social character in Fromm's conceptualization of individual character development, he did not privilege a fixed statistical or a biological norm to establish this idea. According to Fromm, traits may be durable over time, but as an adaptive response to a social environment, most (if not all) individual character traits are amenable to modification.⁷⁹ It is also important to differentiate Fromm's view of character development from the concept of behavior. While behavior refers to an observable action, character orientation refers to the source of action that underlies behavior. Another way of stating this is that "character structure determines action as well as thoughts and ideas" (Fromm, 1962, p. 74).

An example of Fromm's dynamic understanding of character is found in his concepts of "reactive hatred" and "character-conditioned hatred," which were timely social character constructions that he presented when first calling for an analysis of love (see Fromm, 1939, pp. 513-517).⁸⁰ Fromm depicted reactive

⁷⁹ One gets a sense of optimism in Fromm's view of character regarding the potential for individual change that was absent from contemporaneous deterministic outlooks of unconscious instinct theories and behaviorism which were popular during Fromm's time.

⁸⁰ Fromm's examination of hatred led him to conclude that self-hatred goes more unrecognized as a contemporary cultural phenomenon than hatred of others. He equated this with the notion that love for others is preferable to self-love which is often portrayed as selfishness or narcissism in contemporary culture (Fromm, 1939, p. 521). Following this examination, Fromm proposed that a new theoretical investigation of love is a top priority for psychology. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5 and in the Conclusion of this dissertation.

hatred and character-conditioned hatred as distortions of the core human desire for love rather than being driven by a biological instinct. As an example, reactive hatred could be seen in the response of many people throughout the world following the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001. The collective hatred towards “terrorists” that quickly ensued was a response to having one’s security, ideals, love for other human beings, and an overall positive affirmation for life threatened. It is a protective response to aggression that is rooted in a malleable form of self-hatred. On the other hand, character-conditioned hatred is a more durable form of hostility that is rooted in early childhood reactions. The beating of Rodney King, an African-American man brutally beaten by four Los Angeles police officers in the early 1990’s, can be interpreted as a national display of character-conditioned race hatred on the part of the four policemen involved that was captured on videotape and viewed by an entire nation. The body movements, gestures, verbal tauntings, and facial expressions of the policemen witnessed in the video, conveyed their sadistic satisfaction and pleasure. It demonstrated a fundamental hostility that was grossly out of proportion to the expected police procedure for apprehending someone suspected of breaking the law. “In the case of reactive hatred, [e.g., the collective hatred towards the terrorists following the collapse of the World Trade Center] it is the situation or event that creates the hatred. In the case of character-conditioned hatred, [i.e., the case of the Rodney King beating] “an ‘idling’ hostility is *actualized* by the situation” (Fromm, 1939, p. 514). These incidents are contemporary examples of Fromm’s character formations of hatred

which presaged his later sadomasochistic modes of relatedness (Fromm, 1941, 1956).

Putting aside his methodological differences from Freud for the moment, Fromm (1973) recognized that his own theory of the sadomasochistic character did not make sense without an understanding of Freud's notion of the "anal character" (p. 327).⁸¹ According to Freud (1908/1957b), the adult traits of orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy develop as a reaction formation or a sublimation of an early childhood fixation on anal erotic desires. Later, Freud added punctuality and cleanliness to this syndrome (Fromm, 1973, p. 327).

Fromm (1964) considered the anal character type as a partial glimpse of an overall "hoarding character" (p. 54) who avoids the risk of being vulnerable to other human beings and the outside world. "The anal-hoarding character has only one way to feel safe in his relatedness to the world: by possessing and controlling it, since he is incapable of relating himself by love" (Fromm, 1973, p. 328). There may or may not be a fixation on anal interests and artifacts such as feces, dirt, useless things, and miserliness, etc. Fromm (1964) understood this set of behaviors as a broader *symbolic* expression of a morbid "general affinity to all that is not alive" (p. 54). The hoarding character type was Fromm's reply to Freud's partial libido theory for sadomasochistic character development.⁸²

Fromm, (1973) viewed the anal-hoarding character type as having "a close relationship to sadism as described by classic psychoanalysis" (p. 328).

⁸¹The concept of the anal character is found in "Character and Anal Erotism" (Freud, 1908/1957b, pp. 169-175). It was later expanded upon by Karl Abraham (1921/1966a).

⁸²Again, Freud's partial libido theory constructed sadomasochism as both a normal and abnormal perversion. The anal character was an abnormal development based on a fixation in the anal stage of development "that showed traits of sadism and destructiveness" (Fromm, 1964, p. 54).

However, Fromm maintained that “because of the close connection between sadism and masochism it is more correct to speak of a sadomasochistic character, even though the one or the other aspect will be more dominant in a particular person” (p. 326).

The “authoritarian character” was the social manifestation of the psychological features of Fromm’s sadomasochistic character into a political attitude that gained ascendancy throughout Fascist and non-Fascist societies during Fromm’s era (p. 326). Although the authoritarian person may appear “normal” from a psychoneurotic perspective on the surface, the sadomasochistic disturbance is in actuality found at a more profound level. Underlying the pathology in Fromm’s authoritarian character is a disturbance of the self as opposed to a set of biological and or egoistic drives.⁸³ In Fromm’s (1941) own words:

Since the term *sado-masochistic* is associated with ideas of perversion and neurosis, I prefer to speak instead of the sado-masochistic character, especially when not the neurotic but the normal person is meant, of the “*authoritarian character*.” This terminology is justifiable because the sadomasochistic person is always characterized by his attitude toward authority. He admires authority and tends to submit to it, but at the same time he wants to be an authority himself and have others submit to him. (p. 162)

Fromm’s authoritarian character is a sadomasochist who is part of a social sadomasochistic ideology as opposed to an isolated instance of sexual perversion. Fromm’s authoritarian character represents an important turning

⁸³ A “self” implies a concept of the individual with an active sense of agency and responsibility for one’s thoughts and behavior. This is an important difference between Fromm and Freud that will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

point in history of understanding sadomasochism because it showed the pathology of sadomasochism to be more widespread than infrequent cases of a sexual perversion or a rare character disorder. This is one reason why Fromm's re-visioning of a theory of character formation has been under-appreciated as a contribution in psychology (Roazen, 2001). Roazen (2001) suggests that Fromm's reading of Freud's theory of psychosexual development has been vastly underrated by most students of psychoanalysis (p. 60). Part of the contemporary lack of appreciation of Fromm's contribution to character theory may be due, in part, to Fromm's own continued praise of Freud and his attempt to remain within a psychoanalytic framework in his later years. But, I would like to argue that underneath Fromm's "Freud piety" was a visionary who re-interpreted previous psychoanalytic conceptualizations of human character with a concern for the human values of freedom and love. Fromm's conceptualization of character was to be a key factor in his theory of sadomasochism because it emphasized the importance of social ideology as a source of real *human* influence to be reckoned with on individual character outcomes. Also, Fromm's theory of character stressed a balanced dialectical exchange between culture and the individual person. Prior to Fromm individual-cultural dialectic theories of character development were (i.e., Reich) were one-dimensional and portrayed the individual as a helpless reactor to overwhelming cultural forces.

Other influences, such as Fromm's humanism, his views on gender, and his antipathy towards scientism which will all be discussed below played a big role in his turning to a new existential perspective of sadomasochism theory.

Section B: Influences on Fromm's Theory of Sadomasochism

Fromm's Humanism: Combining Marx and Freud

Fromm (1962) has stated that besides Freud, his biggest influence was Karl Marx (p. 3); he saw a common thread of humanism running through their theories. He declared that the "basic element common to both systems is their humanism. Humanism in the sense that each man represents all of humanity; hence, that there is nothing human which could be alien to him" (p. 17). He situated Marx and Freud in the tradition of the humanism of the Renaissance. According to Fromm, both viewed "the unfolding of the total, universal man...to be the highest flowering of natural development" (p. 25). Fromm (1956) also emphasized Marx's interpretation of the concept of love which stressed that love is itself recognized when it calls forth further acts of love (pp. 23-24).

Fromm considered Marx and Freud to be modern liberators for the person trapped by the illusion of individual and social freedom. For Freud, liberation meant self-awareness through an analysis of the personal unconscious. For Marx, it meant freedom from social alienation and economic oppression (p. 14). Fromm was convinced that Freud's method was best suited to examine the Marxist principles of culture,⁸⁴ subject to important modifications. At a time when most analysts considered psychoanalysis and Marxism to be antithetical, Fromm was among a handful of thinkers who attempted to bridge a meaningful synthesis of these systems. What distinguished Fromm's attempt to accomplish this synthesis was his high regard for the individual and his focus on self-realization

⁸⁴ Marx's view of culture stressed that the economic structure of a society determined its "political and legal institutions, its philosophy, art, religion, etc." (Fromm, 1962, p. 71).

(Fromm, 1941, pp. 256-257). Fromm (1941) credited Freud for creating a system that engendered humanistic values. “Only a dynamic psychology, the foundations of which have been laid by Freud, can get further than paying lip service to the human factor” (p. 13). Although he was at times an astute critic of Freud, Fromm’s admiration for Freud led to a tendency to credit the father of psychoanalysis for some of his own most valuable insights.

Fromm’s (1941) humanism stemmed from his belief that each person desires to grow and experience themselves as an independent human being who is at the same time integrally related with others (p. 256).⁸⁵ As a psychoanalyst, Fromm’s humanistic inclinations can be seen through his endorsement of an actively engaged posture with analysands that affirmed the right to each of his patient’s happiness (Burston, 1992, p. 212). Fromm’s stance as an analyst contrasted sharply with the posture of the disinterested observer that was hegemonous throughout psychoanalytic practice during his era.

In *Escape From Freedom* (1941), Fromm’s humanism is also evident via his criticism of contemporaneous models of psychology and sociology that lacked a descriptive account of human vitality and agency. Fromm chafed at what he called the “neglect of the human factor” (p. 12) in the social sciences. He concluded that the common denominator in most theories of human behavior was the notion that human nature was passive and lacked significance in terms of being able to make an impact on the status quo. Fromm wrote:

⁸⁵ Fromm’s humanism can intellectually be differentiated from the American humanism found in Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman which stresses self-reliance. As a European, Fromm’s humanism was inspired by thinkers like Meister Eickhart, Spinoza, Marx, and Freud (Burston, 1991, p. 184).

Common to all these theories is the assumption that human nature has no dynamism of its own and that psychological changes are to be understood in terms of the development of new “habits” as an adaptation to new cultural patterns. (pp. 12-13)

An outstanding feature of *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941), which will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5 is how Fromm injected a new dynamism into the portrayal of the individual human being. Fromm characterized the individual as an active, responsible agent who faces daunting challenges in everyday social situations, and whose choices affect the course of human history. Before we arrive at that point however, there is another theorist besides Freud and Marx who influenced Fromm deeply concerning his view of the connection between culture and the human character. Without a doubt, the work of J.J. Bachofen plays an important but quiet role in Erich Fromm’s formation of a new theoretical perspective on sadomasochism.

Fromm and Bachofen

Fromm studied the matriarchal theory of J. J. Bachofen (1861). Bachofen’s comparison of patriarchal and matriarchal societies was the subject of one of Fromm’s earliest and most provocative essays titled “The Theory of Mother Right and its Relevance for Social Psychology” (Fromm, 1934/1970g, pp. 110-135). In that essay Fromm examined the differences between matriarchal and patriarchal cultural influences as they impacted the contemporary individual character. One example of the many insights that Fromm found from study of Bachofen was that:

The value system of matriarchal culture fits in with [a] passive surrender to mother, nature, and earth and to their central role. Only the natural and biological are worthwhile; the spiritual, cultural, and rational are worthless...In contrast with the bourgeois natural law, where “nature” is patriarchal society turned into an absolute, matriarchal law is characterized by the dominance of instinctual, natural, blood-based values...there is no logical reasonable balancing of guilt and atonement. (p. 115)

As seen in the above passage, Fromm was struck by the differences between matriarchal and patriarchal values. A patriarchal cultural mind-set includes anxiety, deliberation over action, dependence on fatherly authority, guilt, and atonement (p. 124). Gynocratic (matriarchal) values by contrast, emphasize acts of spontaneous love, attachment to blood-bond ties, and “the ‘natural’ principle of talion, of returning like for like” (p. 115).

Fromm examined contemporary culture in light of Bachofen’s gendered societal analyses. According to Fromm, the social character of his own particular era was over-saturated with patriarchal values “for great parts of the lower middle class in Germany and other European countries” (Fromm, 1941, p. 162). The “authoritarian character,” which was alluded to earlier⁸⁶ is a social prototype of patriarchal culture that Fromm believed was at epidemic proportions during the rise of Fascism when he wrote *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941). The authoritarian is recognized by a deference to formal authority and the skillful manipulation over the behavior of others, which both suggest magnified patriarchal values.

⁸⁶ See pages 111 and 120

Fromm concluded that Freud's minimization of the importance of pre-oedipal development and his dramatic devaluation of women could not be separated from the patriarchal value system that organized his Western bourgeois culture. The primary organizing principle behind patriarchal culture is generally considered to be the father-son relationship, which forms the template through which all forms of relationships are evaluated. Fromm (1934/1970g) called the privileging of the father-son relationship the "patricentric complex" and described its social character:

The patriarchal social structure is closely bound up with the class character of present-day society. This society is based, to an important degree, on specific psychic attitudes that are partially rooted in unconscious drives; and these psychic attitudes effectively complement the external coerciveness of the governmental apparatus. The patriarchal family is one of the most important loci for producing the psychic attitudes that operate to maintain the stability of class society. (p. 124)

Fromm demonstrated that Freud lacked an important critically distant perspective towards his own social structure that would have helped him realize the limitations of his theories (p. 128).

Fromm also criticized Freud's portrayal of the mother image as a weak, sentimental figure and his exclusion of mother-child dynamics in his theory of psychosexual development (Fromm, 1934/1970g, pp. 128-132; also see Suttie, 1935, pp. 215-223). As a cultural remedy for the contemporary imbalance of patricentric values over gynocratic ones, Fromm advocated for the "optimistic

trust in mother's unconditional love, far fewer guilt feelings...and a greater capacity for pleasure and happiness" (p. 131). The myth of Orestes, which Fromm appropriated from Bachofen's interpretation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* reflects the matriarchal values found in gynecocratic culture (p. 115). Orestes sought to avenge the murder of his father, King Agamemnon, by killing his mother Clytemnestra. He is temporarily seduced by Clytemnestra's charms and her protestations of love for him which renders Orestes passive until he realizes that his mother is dispensing pleasure only as a ploy to keep him under her power. Orestes then summons the strength to strike the fatal blow (May, 1953, p. 126). If one weighs the impact of the myth of Orestes and contrasts it with the continued popularity of the myth of Oedipus to explain personality development, then Fromm's point regarding the imbalance between matriarchal and patriarchal values in contemporary western bourgeois culture is easily made (see p.128). Like Ian Suttie (1935, chap. 14) who also chafed at Freud's misogyny, Fromm espoused the notion that the Oedipus complex and the concept of "penis envy" were cultural artifacts (Burston, 1991, p. 50). Fromm used the ideas of Bachofen to inform him how gender bias exists via cultural norms and how accommodation to such norms does not necessarily imply a balanced psychosexual perspective nor a healthy personality. This element in Fromm's thinking led to his conceptualization of psychological well-being and human pathology as qualitative notions that do not rely on established societal norms as we shall see.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Fromm's (1955) qualitative concept of "normative humanism" (p. 22) will be discussed in chapter 5

Fromm's independent theoretical social vision was complimented by his proactive integration of individual relational theories of psychology, which as we will see next, took him outside the conventional boundaries of psychoanalytic thought on the concepts of ego and personality development.

Object Relational Insights

Alongside his dissatisfaction with libido theory, Fromm showed that he was also "involved [with] some prescient reflections on object-relationships" (Burston, 1991, p. 60). He sketched a developmental theory based on object-relationships that he contrasted with Freud's psychosexual stages. What stands out in Fromm's early critique of Freud is a studious sense of caution as he teases apart the two approaches and an ability to present an independent theoretical outlook. As shown in the passage below, Fromm (1932/1970i) did not automatically assume, as other analysts did, that object relations theory was consistent with Freud's psychoanalytic findings. Fromm wrote:

It is important to make a distinction between...erogenous lust and the person's object relationships. The latter are the person's (loving or hating) attitudes toward himself or other people he encounters; in a word, they are his emotions, feelings and attitudes toward the surrounding world in general. These object relationships also have a typical course of development. (p. 167)

We find Fromm in this early and pivotal essay being very careful to separate lust from other human needs. Another noteworthy feature of Fromm's perspective that immediately shines forth is his sense of the person having a self-view; an

awareness of one's self in relation to others in the world.⁸⁸ As Fromm continued, he seems to be trying to avoid an explicit rejection of the idea that object-relationships are fixed to bodily erogenous zones, yet he clearly differentiates between orgasmic pleasure and object relationships:

...These object relationships are seen as having a very close connection with erogenous zones...At this point I really do not want to raise the whole question as to whether the connection is really as close as much of the psychoanalytic literature would have it; nor do I want to consider whether and to what extent an object relationship, typical of a particular erogenous zone, can also develop independently of the particular fate of that zone. So let me just lay stress on the importance of making a basic distinction between organ pleasure and object relationships. (p. 167)

As suggested in the above passage, Fromm emphasizes object relational dynamics as strategies that meet physical and emotional needs (and not strictly sexual ones). Fromm was not part of the British psychoanalytic school, which included Melanie Klein and Ronald Fairburn and later became known as the object-relations school. At the same time, Fromm's views on character showed some convergence with the object-relational concepts of Fairburn (see Burston, 1991, p. 62).

When one takes examples from Fromm's (1941) later object-relational descriptions of sadomasochistic dynamics in his writings on different character

⁸⁸ I believe that one can see in Fromm's language even at this early stage of his career a grounding in existential and self/other relational thought. For example, Fromm uses the term "encounter" to depict an awareness of one's self in relation to other people and things in the world which has a distinctly existential and relational structure to it.

types however, there is a distinctive sense of Fromm's existential-humanistic inclinations. A good example is found in Fromm's description of symbiosis.⁸⁹

Fromm writes:

Symbiosis...means the union of one individual self with another self (or any other power outside of the own self) in such a way to make each lose the integrity of its own self and to make completely dependent on each other (p. 157).

In the very next line we find Fromm stating that, "the sadistic person needs his object just as much as the masochistic needs his" (p. 157). One can see here that Fromm is using object-relational language to depict how human beings can objectify one another in sadomasochistic relationships.⁹⁰ This was clearly different from other contemporaneous object-relational models in psychoanalysis. While Fromm was cognizant of the object-relational school of psychoanalysis and had some convergence with Fairburn's relational focus on those dynamics, ultimately Fromm's use of object-relational thought was original and strongly influenced by his existential-humanistic disposition. In the next section we will explore how Fromm borrowed from other individual psychologies and integrated them into his existential-humanistic theoretical framework of sadomasochism.

Interpersonal Psychology

In *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941), Fromm shows how he was influenced by the interpersonal psychologies of Karen Horney (1937) and Harry

⁸⁹ Symbiosis will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 5

⁹⁰ Fromm's use of object-relational language to depict symbiosis is actually highly evocative of Martin Buber's (1958) existential "I-it" dialogical structure. The "I-it," mode (in contrast to "I-thou") refers to the separation of the human body from its surrounding lived-world context. All sadomasochistic relations are inherently objectified ("I-it") relationships.

Stack Sullivan (1953). Fromm (1941) mentions how he and Horney both rejected the intrapsychic libido explanation for neurosis (p. 140). Fromm also credits Horney for pointing out the masochistic tendencies in the neurotic personality (p. 149) and for articulating the milder forms of sadomasochistic behavior in the everyday custom of deferring to authority figures (p. 172).

Fromm (1941) also expresses solidarity with Sullivan's idea "that individual psychology is fundamentally social psychology" (p. 288). He points out how Sullivan supported his view that "man is *primarily* a social being, and not, as Freud assumes, primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others in order to satisfy his instinctual needs" (p. 288). However, despite his many convergences with Sullivan and Horney, Fromm stood apart from them when proposing the concept of existential aloneness; it hinted at a philosophical-anthropological foundation embedded in Fromm's concept of anxiety that is absent from Sullivan's or Horney's theories. His position on existential aloneness separated Fromm from most psychoanalytic and social science thinkers of his era. At the same time, Fromm (1973) made a point of separating his existential psychological concepts from the existential philosophy of Sartre and Heidegger (p. 27).

Section C: Fromm's Rejection of the Death Instinct and His Differences with Reich

Fromm's First Misgivings about Freud's Death Instinct

Prior to Fromm, there is little question that Freud's theory of the death instinct for primary masochism caused the biggest stir in sadomasochism theory since

Krafft-Ebing. Fromm's (1932/1970) immediate response to Freud's new theory for sadomasochism was one of doubt:

Impressed by the libidinal admixtures in the instincts for self-preservation and the special significance of the destructive tendencies, Freud has modified his original position. Over against the life-maintaining [erotic] instincts, he now sets the death instinct. Significant as Freud's argument is for this modification in his original position, it is far more speculative and less empirical than his original position. To me it seems to rest upon an intermingling of biological data and psychological tendencies, an intermingling that Freud has otherwise avoided. (p. 138)

As seen in the above passage, Fromm was critical of Freud's use of dualities and his increasing speculative psychobiology.⁹¹ He understood quite well the philosophical underpinnings of Freud's concepts and was familiar with other systems of thought. As a result, Fromm was able to bring a level of depth and insight to his criticisms of the death instinct that stood apart from other rejections of the death instinct (Robinson, 1969, p. 47).⁹²

While Fromm was aware of the limitations of Freud's theory of the death instinct, he never losing sight of the deeper significance of Freud's thought that underscored the essential struggle of life and death forces at the core of psychic life. However, as the following synopsis suggests, Fromm (1941) never subscribed to Freud's biologism which he used to explain destructive impulses:

⁹¹Freud's use of dualities and speculation was discussed in Chapter 2. Also, see Holt (1989, pp. 42-43).

⁹²Lewin (1937/1999) has noted problems with Freudian psychoanalytic concepts in a similar way. He called them "a *body of ideas* rather than a *system of theories and concepts*" (p. 68).

The assumption of the death-instinct is satisfactory inasmuch as it takes into consideration the full weight of destructive tendencies, which had been neglected in Freud's earlier theories. But it is not satisfactory inasmuch as it resorts to a biological explanation that fails to take account sufficiently of the fact that the amount of destructiveness varies enormously among individuals and social groups. (pp. 180-181)

Fromm developed his own concept of destructiveness into a major mechanism of escape. He rooted it in the existential condition of "the unbearableness of individual powerlessness and isolation" (Fromm, 1941, p. 177). Fromm's interpretation of Freud's notion of destructiveness embedded in his theories of sadomasochism is an indication of Fromm's growing existential outlook which was becoming more explicit and attached to his theoretical framework of sadomasochistic dynamics. I would now like to contrast Fromm's critique of Freud's death instinct with Wilhelm Reich's contemporaneous critique of the same doctrine in order to show how Fromm's unique existentialist perspective became explicit and separated from the scientism embedded in Reich's (and others) psychoanalytic approaches to sadomasochism.

Implications of Fromm's Differences with Reich on His Theory of Sadomasochism

Reich was another vocal critic of Freud's death instinct (Robinson, 1969, pp. 31-38). Like Fromm, he protested Freud's penchant for depicting socio-historical processes by referencing the psychological tendencies of modern day neurotics. Both Fromm and Reich had "a keen appreciation for the role of the family, education, and religion in inculcating the attitudes and inhibitions that foster

widespread compliance to class rule and apathy or hostility toward social change” (Burston, 1991, p. 31). Beyond these similarities, Fromm and Reich had very different approaches in their disagreements with Freud.

Reich saw no need for a theory of a death instinct. In his view, sex-negating messages from the culture censor the ego and act as a destructive, “death-like” force to a healthy sexual libido. Reich’s theory of the libido however, did build upon Freud’s first libido theory of sadomasochism. Reich envisioned an intrapsychic genital libido seeking satisfaction from the environment. When frustrated, the genital libido tends to re-cathect to earlier libidinal stages or “zones.” This scientific notion of the genital libido by Reich shows how much closer he was to Freud’s theoretical style than Fromm was because Reich subscribed to the rigid notion of fixation to specific bodily erogenous zones and an almost literal idea of regression (see Robinson, 1969, p. 47). Reich’s critique of the death instinct really parted company with Freud only on the question of location for the source of destructiveness. Reich viewed the source of destruction coming from a single source in the external environment (i.e., the inhibitory sex-negating messages of society) and acting as an overwhelming force that overtakes the intrapsychic libido. Reich’s vision of the intrapsychic libido was a helpless, dependent, entity that absorbed sadistic pain. As Reich (1932/1946) stated :

The original genetic formula [e.g. Freud’s theory of the actual neuroses] of the neurosis is still correct: the neurosis develops from a conflict between

sexual drive and fear of actual punishment at the hands of an authoritarian society. ...

Thus, the hypothesis of the death instinct makes one forget completely that the “inner mechanisms” which constitute an antithesis to sexuality are moral inhibitions which represent the prohibitions imposed by the outer world, by society. (p. 209)

Reich never got past the idea of two separate psychic entities (the individual and society respectively) being at war with each other to depict sadomasochistic processes.⁹³ Either the sex-negating environment wins (which for Reich was always the case in patriarchal systems) or the intrapsychic libido is free to follow its genital needs.

While Fromm (1934/1970g) agreed with Reich that the impact of a sex-negating culture had debilitating consequences for the individual, Fromm viewed each individual (and her or his psychic processes) as an active agent in a more human dialectical relationship with the culture. Furthermore, Fromm did not need to revive Freud’s theory of the “actual neuroses,” which would have implied a commitment to mechanistic materialism (p. 126). Nonetheless, if one takes a look at Fromm’s (1934/1970g) remarks on sex-negating culture, one can see important points of convergence with Reich. Fromm agreed that culture played a major role in either facilitating or inhibiting sexual satisfaction. In 1934, for example, Fromm wrote:

⁹³ Reich’s model for sadomasochism like Freud’s model is a “dialectic of control” (Benjamin, 1988, p. 53) that can never be

Sexuality offers one of the most elementary and powerful opportunities for satisfaction and happiness. If it were permitted to the full extent required for the productive development of the human personality, rather than limited by the need to maintain control over the masses, the fulfillment of this important opportunity for happiness would lead to intensified demands for satisfaction in other areas of life... The development of the “genital character” is conditioned by the absence of sexual restraints, which impede the optimal development of a person. Among the qualities...is a psychic and intellectual independence, whose social relevance needs no further emphasis. (p. 126)

Fromm’s “genital character” contrasted with Reich’s scientific genital libido; it was less of a literal formulation that did not place as much emphasis on orgasm as the expression of genital sexuality. Fromm (1969/1992c) later credited Reich for taking “into account the quality of the orgasmic experience, not just its effectiveness” (p. 88). But if one looks closer, Fromm’s notion of the genital character in the end is more humanistic and diversified when compared with Reich’s scientific explanations for the genital libido.

The theoretical differences between Reich and Fromm cited above are germane to their respective ideas of sadomasochism. For Reich, sadomasochism was viewed as a psychoneurosis. For Fromm, sadomasochism is a character disorder based on existential realities such as the condition of having to deal with separateness from others in the world. Another important difference is that Reich privileged sexuality at the core of his theory for

sadomasochism whereas Fromm's model acknowledged sexuality without privileging it as the primary passion driving sadomasochism.

Section D: Erich Fromm's Call for an Analysis of Love and Sadomasochistic Pseudo-Love and His Existential Analysis of Destructiveness

It is interesting to note that at the same time Fromm's interest in the authoritarian character was growing alongside his de-emphasis on the primacy of sexual needs in human character development, his interest was increasing on the subject and theory of love. In "Selfishness and Self-Love" (Fromm, 1939, pp. 507-523) we find Fromm calling for a psychological analysis of love and its masochistic and sadistic "pseudo-love" substitutes (p. 518). Fromm wrote:

There is no word in our language which has been so much misused and prostituted as the word "love"... it has been used ...to force people into sacrificing their own happiness, into submitting their whole self to those who who profited from this surrender... Yet a psychologist may not properly succumb to this embarrassment...to make a...critical analysis of the phenomenon of love and to unmask pseudo-love— is an obligation that the psychologist has no right to avoid. (p. 518)

Following his call for an analysis of love, Fromm classified two different (passive and active) types of pseudo-love called "symbiosis" (p. 518) which he initially defined as "a basic inability to be independent" (p. 518). After examining some contemporary examples of "sadistic" and "masochistic" pseudo-love, Fromm wrote, "It appears from what has been said that love cannot be separated from

freedom and independence” (p. 518). With this last statement, Fromm was clearly attaching the notions of love and freedom together as a cohesive premise from which sadomasochistic behaviors and tendencies could be explored.

In Fromm’s next publication, *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941) we find his first explicit existential critique of Freud’s death instinct and the beginning outline of a new existential-humanistic theoretical framework for sadomasochism. One outstanding feature of Fromm’s critique of Freud’s death instinct was how he was able to step outside of the hegemony of scientism and infuse an original existential outlook into his discourse on sadomasochism.⁹⁴ A closer look at Fromm’s (1941) brief de-constructive analysis of Freud’s concept of “destructiveness” really marks the moment that an existential and humanistic psychological framework of sadomasochism arrived in the history of sadomasochism theory. He starts out with a concise review of each of Freud’s three phases of theories of sadomasochism in *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941, pp. 147-148) and it is worth a closer look.⁹⁵ As seen in the passage below, Fromm offers a perceptive summary of Freud’s early formulations on sadomasochism noting how he abandoned the sexual drive as the primary cause for sadomasochism. Fromm writes:

Freud...originally thought that sado-masochism was essentially a sexual phenomenon. Observing...practices in little children, he assumed that sado-

⁹⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and nothingness* (Sartre, 1941/1956, part III, chap. 1) offered another existential examination of sadomasochism from a philosophical standpoint during the same year that Fromm (1941) published *Escape from freedom*.

⁹⁵ Most of Fromm’s passage on Freud is included to highlight the point where he moves away from summarizing Freud’s theories and onto his insertion of a new existential perspective on the theme of destructiveness.

masochism was a “partial-drive” which regularly appears in the development of the sexual instinct...[and] that sado-masochistic tendencies are due to a fixation on an early level or to a later regression to it. (p. 147)

Fromm next continued with a summary of Freud’s second phase, focusing on the major assumption of a primary death instinct to shift to a primary masochism theory for sadomasochism. Fromm (1941) continues:

Assuming that there is a biological tendency to destroy which can be directed either against others or against oneself, Freud suggested that masochism is essentially the product of this so-called death instinct. ...He further suggested that this death-instinct, which we cannot observe directly, amalgamates itself with the sexual instinct and in the amalgamation appears as masochism if directed against one’s own person, and sadism if directed against others. (p. 147)

Unlike other Freudian critics who continued to maintain a separate mind-set about masochistic and sadistic processes, we see Fromm’s fluid interchangeable vision of sadomasochism as a phenomenon unto itself shining forth in the above passage. In the very next line, we find Fromm addressing Freud’s notion of destructiveness behind his theory of sadomasochism:

In short, according to Freud man has only the choice of either destroying himself or destroying others, if he fails to amalgamate destructiveness with sex. [italics added] This theory is basically different from Freud’s original assumption about sado-masochism. There, sado-masochism was essentially a sexual phenomenon, but in the newer theory it is essentially a nonsexual

phenomenon, the sexual factor in it being only due to the amalgamation of the death-instinct with the sexual instinct. (pp. 147-148)

The italics show where Fromm first introduces the idea of human choice in reference to the destructive instincts that propel sadomasochism. Fromm was offering a definite alternative to the scientific formulation of sadomasochism that Freud was perpetuating for most of the first half of the 20th century. Although Fromm's highlighting of the notion of choice as seen above was a typically humanist and existentialist gesture on his part, I submit that his insertion of the existential theme in his criticism of Freud's death instinct was a momentous occasion in the history of sadomasochism theory. We see Fromm's "existential turn" rescuing the theory of sadomasochism from the clutches of impersonal scientism threatening to marginalize sadomasochism into a rare sexual perversion that is irrelevant in the lives of most people. Fromm's critique which placed human subjectivity at the center of sadomasochism theory supplanted the excessive abstractionism that was losing sight of sadomasochism at that time. Instead of burying sadomasochism theory with biological drives and sexual transgressions, Fromm showed that sadomasochism strikes at the very core of what it means to love others as well as to love one's self. He also attached the concepts of human freedom and personal responsibility to his notion of love and then integrated them into a theory of sadomasochism. I do not believe that Erich Fromm gets enough credit for saving sadomasochism from drifting into scientific obscurantism at this point in the history of psychology. "Selfishness and Self-Love" (Fromm, 1939, pp. 507-523) not only pointed out that deeper and more

serious issues besides sex are involved in sadomasochism. Fromm started to develop a viable theoretical framework based on deeper human needs and values that shed light on sadomasochism. Up until then, only Freud's investigation of moral masochism and Reich's Freudo-Marxist cultural theory suggested that sadomasochism was important beyond its manifestation as a rare sexual perversion. However, both of those theorists remained fixed on a primary sexual theory to explain sadomasochism. It is important to note that Fromm raised the issues of love, freedom, and responsibility in conjunction with sadomasochism during a time when the themes of love, personal responsibility, and freedom were still considered solely to be within the purview of philosophy and ethics.

Fromm began blending his existential-humanistic insights with a psycho-analytically informed appreciation of human character that led to a new nosography of sadomasochistic syndromes called "mechanisms of escape" which will be explored in chapter 5. In *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941) Fromm introduced the mechanisms of escape and in *The Art of Loving* (Fromm, 1956) he explicated them further.

The shift in Fromm's thinking on sadomasochism really began with his dissatisfaction of Freud's libido theory and his de-emphasis on the primacy of sexual needs to explain human character. Fromm's theory of character formation, which tends to still be overlooked today, was another factor that led him to a different existential-social-humanistic theoretical outlook on sadomasochism. The big "existential turn" in psychoanalysis came when Fromm

inserted the concept of choice into his critique of Freud's death instinct and called for a theory of love. Fromm's publications of "Selfishness and Self-Love" (1939) followed by *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941) and *The Art of Loving* (Fromm, 1956) are the first sources that present a theory of sadomasochism based on existential-humanistic principles of psychology informed from a psychoanalytic perspective. These works will be highlighted in the next chapter.

Sartre's 'Being and Nothingness' and a New Era of Sadomasochism Theory

At about the same time that Fromm was calling for a psychological theory of love and examining sadomasochism from the perspective of existential and humanistic principles, Jean-Paul Sartre was investigating human relations from a rich phenomenological perspective called "the look" in *Being and nothingness* (Sartre, 1943/1956, chap. 3) which featured masochism and sadism as central themes. Sartre proposed the look as an ontological foundation of human relations which renders all experience possible and his writings on the look extended the theoretical discourse on sadomasochism beyond psychoanalysis and traditional psychology.⁹⁶ After Sartre, other existential-phenomenological thinkers followed his lead and shed new light on the pervasiveness of sadomasochistic relations in everyday life in important ways. In chapter 5 we will be taking a closer look at the theories of Fromm, Sartre, and the post-Sartreans in terms of their similarities, differences, and overall contributions to the history of sadomasochism theory.

⁹⁶ Although Sartre is a philosopher, he provides insights on sadomasochism that continue to have relevance from a psychological perspective which will be explored in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

Fromm's, Sartre's, and Post-Sartrean Theories of Sadomasochism:

A Comparison of Existential Approaches

Introduction

In this last chapter, I will examine the existential approaches to sadomasochism of Erich Fromm, Jean-Paul Sartre, and various post-Sartrean existential-phenomenological thinkers. Because Fromm was a trained psychoanalyst with a background in sociology, his social-psychoanalytic perspective on sadomasochism differs from Sartre's philosophical examination of sadomasochistic relations. Despite their considerable differences, I hope to demonstrate that their similarities as existential thinkers and critics of scientism had a beneficial impact on current day sadomasochism theory. Each theorist de-centered sexuality as the primary source of sadomasochism and stressed the primacy of sociality at the heart of sadomasochistic relations. Up until the time of Fromm and Sartre, no one had addressed to the level of depth and inclusiveness the idea of de-centering sexuality in a theory of sadomasochism since Freud first suggested that sexuality might be loosened as a strict causal theory for moral masochism.

I will first, in section A of this chapter, examine the existential foundations embedded in Erich Fromm's concept of love that became the theoretical framework for his conceptualization of sadomasochism. Included in section A is a discussion of Fromm's "mechanisms of escape" which offers a psychological nosology for different types of sadomasochistic relationships. Section B examines Jean-Paul Sartre's existential-phenomenological ontology of sadomasochistic relations, while section C

explores the ways in which post-Sartrean psychoanalysts and philosophers, such as Franz Fanon and Simone DeBeauvoir brought to light the pervasiveness of sadomasochistic dynamics that are embedded in the social context of race and gender relations. Section C also includes an examination of Medard Boss's *daseinsanalytic* theory of love based on the existential-phenomenological insights of Martin Heidegger (1927/1962). Boss's case study on sadomasochism is included to demonstrate the contributions that daseinsanalysis had on the psychotherapeutic treatment of sadomasochism.

Finally, in section D, after each existential thinker's contributions are examined, I will compare the major similarities and differences between Fromm's and Sartre's perspectives of self/other relationships and their configurations of subjectivity as it affects their respective theories of sadomasochism. My analysis of Fromm and Sartre will bring chapter 5 to a close.

Section A: Fromm's Theory of Sadomasochism

Existential Foundations

Erich Fromm was the first psychologist to take the view that sadomasochism is a perversion of the human capacity to love. For Fromm, sadomasochism is more than an erotic disturbance. In one of his earliest reflections on the differences between love and symbiotic (sadomasochistic) pseudo-love, Fromm (1939) outlined a preliminary sketch of "existential aloneness" as a conceptual foundation that is intrinsic to his theory of love. Fromm believed existential aloneness to be a universal condition that each human being must learn to face

and overcome in a productive way. As Fromm viewed it, the ability to overcome existential aloneness allows one the possibility to achieve an authentic and mature love with another person. In “Selfishness and Self Love” (Fromm, 1939, pp. 507-523), he wrote:

It appears. . . that love cannot be separated from freedom and independence. In contradiction to the symbiotic pseudo-love, the basic premise of love is freedom and equality. Its premise is strength, independence, integrity of the self, which can stand alone and bear solitude. This premise holds true for the loving as well as for the loved person. (p. 518)

Fromm’s premise of love, as explicitly stated in the above passage is indivisible from freedom and independence, and it contrasts sharply with what he called “symbiotic pseudo-love” (p. 519). Fromm equated symbiosis,⁹⁷ or pseudo-love, with sadomasochism. According to Fromm, sadomasochistic love is borne out of the inability to stand alone and bear solitude. When one is able to embrace his or her aloneness in the world, then the capacity to love another person increases; when one seeks to escape the anxiety that accompanies being alone, a collapse into sadomasochistic attachments is inevitable. Although Fromm does not use the same philosophical language, a closer examination of the principles embedded in his conceptualization of love and independence (freedom) shares points of convergence with the existential-phenomenological thought of Martin Heidegger (1927/1962) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1956) as will be examined next.

⁹⁷ Symbiosis is discussed in part 2 of this chapter

Thrownness and Facticity

The starting point for Fromm's outlook on humanity begins with the universally given condition of "thrownness,"⁹⁸ which he explained in *The Art of Loving* (Fromm, 1956) in a straightforward manner. Fromm wrote:

When man is born, the human race as well as the individual, he is thrown out of a situation which was definite, as definite as the instincts, into a situation which is indefinite, uncertain and open. . .

. . . this awareness of himself as a separate entity. . . makes his life an unbearable prison. . .

The experience of separateness arouses anxiety; it is indeed the source of all anxiety. (pp. 7-8)⁹⁹

Although not explicit in philosophical terms, there is another crucial principle of existential thought embedded in the above quote by Fromm besides thrownness. First, the fact that we are thrown into a condition of uncertainty from certainty as Fromm puts it, points at the limits of our control over our existence (Cohn, 1997, p. 13). Throughout life, from birth onwards we find ourselves in situations that are not of our own choosing (thrownness), and this brings us into contact with the

⁹⁸ The term "thrownness" ('*Geworfenheit*') was used by Heidegger to describe the unveiling of *Dasein*, usually translated as "being there" (Cohn, 1997, p. 12). As Heidegger (1927/1962) stated, "we call it the "*thrownness*" of this entity into its "there"; indeed it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the "there" (p. 135). Thrownness is a reminder of the limits of control that each of us has over the terms of our own existence (Cohn, 1997, p. 13).

⁹⁹ Fromm's use of the possessive term "man" is a recognized convention in early and mid-twentieth-century psychological discourse that assumes a privileged male perspective in psychology and the sciences. A distinction should be made, however, between Fromm's perspective and the patriarchal attitude which suffused other natural scientific theories of sadomasochism during Fromm's era. While natural science theories typically rendered the feminine invisible, Fromm's notion of femininity explicitly acknowledged the idea of inherent affirmative otherness as something more than a desire to act and behave the *same* as males (see Fromm, 1934/1970, pp. 116-117).

factical¹⁰⁰ conditions of our life. “Facticity” includes our past history, which cannot be changed, although our response to it can change (Cohn, 1997, p. 13). If we do not come to terms with these factual conditions, then the likelihood of our being able to accept ourselves and others in a loving and wholesome manner is compromised. Consequently, according to Fromm, the stage is then set for the inevitable disintegration into sadomasochistic attachments. When we recognize the fact of our helplessness in the face of our factual limitations embedded in our being thrown into the un-chosen circumstances of our life, then the ability to love ourselves and others is enhanced.

Fromm meant to call attention to the factual conditions of existence that presents an inherently psychological problem for each human being. Whether we have the conscious experience of having chosen it to be this way or not (thrownness), each of us has to deal with an assorted and yet specific range of desires that are also rooted in the very fact of our existence called the “existential needs” (Fromm, 1955, chap. 3). First of all, there is the primary need for relatedness, which is “the need [that] is behind all phenomena...[it] constitute[s] the whole gamut of intimate human relations, of all passions which are called love in the broadest sense of the word” (p. 36). This is followed by the need for transcendence (creativity vs. destructiveness), rootedness (brotherliness vs.

¹⁰⁰Facticity is central to the existential-phenomenology of Sartre and Heidegger. Sartre (1941/1956) writes, “the facticity of freedom is the fact that freedom is not able to be free” (p. 802). Heidegger (1927/1962) defines facticity as a way of being-in-the-world that “understands itself bound up in its destiny with the Being of those entities which it encounters within its own world” (p. 56). Fromm (1973) referred to the existentialism of Sartre (and Heidegger) as “abstraction[s] arrived at by the way of metaphysical speculations” (p. 27). However, one can argue that Fromm’s use of thrownness and facticity are ontological principles of human existence which are at least partially convergent with the existential-phenomenology of Sartre and Heidegger.

incest), a sense of identity (individuality vs. herd conformity), and the need for a frame of orientation and devotion (reason vs. irrationality).¹⁰¹ As Fromm understood well, the fulfillment of these needs for each person will vary according to an individual's particular social-historical context and his or her own innate characteristics. What is important to stress here however, is that the existential needs signify a human striving for fulfillment that is borne out of an awareness of being thrown into an uncertain existence and an apprehension of our factual condition of separateness from others in the world (Fromm, 1956, pp. 9-10).

Through reason, we come to accept our factual nature and along with this comes the painful awareness that we are separate from others and from the things of the world around us. We now turn to this next crucial existential component of Fromm's psychology.

Existential Aloneness

According to Fromm (1941), sadomasochistic impulses are "not rooted in bodily processes but in the very essence of the human mode and the practice of life: the need to be related to the world outside oneself, the need to avoid aloneness" (p. 17). Rather than focus on the transformations and displacements of the sexual libido to explain sadomasochistic attachments, Fromm examined the ways in which human beings -- as individuals and as part of the culture -- attempt to deal with the daunting challenge of "existential aloneness." Existential aloneness presents each person with a life-long challenge: Unless we reach out and attempt to join with others -- at least in a minimal way -- life will turn into an unbearable prison that leads to insanity (Fromm, 1956, p. 9). Another way of

¹⁰¹ For a further discussion of the existential needs see *The sane society* (Fromm, 1955, chap. 3).

stating this idea is that as each of us comes to realize that we are helpless against the forces of nature and society and unable to control the terms of our existence, a sense of anxiety ensues. As Fromm described it, “to be separate means to be helpless, unable to grasp the world -- things and people -- actively; it means that the world can invade me without my ability to react” (p. 8).

The anxiety aroused by the experience of separateness is at the core of our being, according to Fromm. This anxiety impels us to seek out a source of relief that is constant and unaffected by the vagaries of interpersonal relationships or inhibiting social forces or circumstances.¹⁰² Fromm (1955) asserted that it is necessary to attempt to overcome separateness and unite with others in some capacity; otherwise, madness ensues (p. 36). For example, in certain psychotic states, the need to withdraw from others and the outside world can be so deep-seated that the psyche will deny their existence altogether. Conversely, one could psychologically inflate one’s sense of self so much that a delusional feeling of omnipotence could develop that makes the outside world appear so small that any threat of being invaded by another is removed.¹⁰³

According to Fromm, most people develop at least a modicum of individuation based on a capacity to tolerate some separateness and to bear solitude. Fromm stressed however, that the degree to which a human being can embrace her or

¹⁰² Karen Horney’s (1945) concept of “basic anxiety” and H.S. Sullivan’s (1953) interpersonal model for anxiety were two other contemporaneous models of anxiety that looked at cultural influences and are often thought to be based on the same premises as Fromm’s model because of their shared rejection of Freud’s theory of anxiety. The key difference, however, is that Fromm’s theory of anxiety is based on *existential aloneness*.

¹⁰³ These extreme forms of withdrawal and psychological inflation in response to existential aloneness, which are consistent with psychotic states, were considered by Fromm to have very minor social consequences. He considered the more ordinary methods of escape, such as herd conformity and orgiastic rituals, which will be discussed later in this chapter to be more culturally significant (Fromm, 1941, p. 183).

his individual separateness is crucial towards being able to achieve a meaningful union with another person. If the escape from existential aloneness precedes the formation of a grounded sense of self, then panic and threat ensues, which engenders sadomasochistic attachments. Herein lies the problem of existential aloneness as it relates to sadomasochism theory. It is the fleeing from aloneness that generates the desire to submerge the self with others and/or with the things of the world so that we can be relieved from the unbearability of anxiety and panic that is set off by each person's sense of isolation (Fromm, 1941, pp. 139-140). In mature loving relationships, which Fromm noted to be rare, one can see an inner foundation of strength and integrity of character stemming from the capacity to tolerate anxiety and face the uncertainty of existential aloneness (p. 29).

Another feature of existential aloneness is how it can lead to the disavowal of responsibility for making our own interpretations in the world. According to Fromm (1956), rather than bear the experience of a disunited, separate existence from others, most human beings are overtaken or "invaded" by the interpretation of what other people hold to be true about the world (p. 8). There is a sense of helplessness that leads the person to yield to others and things surrounding her or him and to see "that the world can invade me without my ability to react" (p. 8).¹⁰⁴ Fromm stresses that it is easier to allow others to

¹⁰⁴ If one accepts the idea that the fear of separateness is an extension of a fear of death or annihilation, then Fromm's description of helplessness in the face of being overtaken by the opinion of others is reminiscent of Heidegger's (1927/1962) notion of "*falling*" into the "*Everyday-Being-towards-Death*" (p. 254). "As falling, everyday Being-towards-death is a constant *fleeing in the face of death* ...[and] has the mode of *evasion in the face of It*— giving new explanations for it, understanding it inauthentically, and concealing it" (p. 254).

interpret the meaning of our existence than it is to do the daunting work of creating our own interpretations based on an authentic reckoning with our given condition of aloneness in the world.

As each person tries to come to terms with her or his existential aloneness there are many choices that are available which provide possible solutions; but they are not limitless. Fromm focused on the failed solutions (methods of escape) to the primary need of overcoming separateness and achieving union with others in order to explain sadomasochism. What is interesting is how Fromm's methods of escape can serve as a system that differentiates among different types of sadomasochistic relationships that occur on an everyday basis alongside of the more atypical clinical disorders. Next, we will examine the five major mechanisms of escape that Fromm explicated which all have a bearing on sadomasochistic outcomes.

Fromm's Mechanisms of Escape:

A Different Psychological Nosography of Sadomasochistic Relatedness

Fromm explicated a variety of escape mechanisms that fail to provide solutions to the primary existential need for aloneness along with the other existential needs in life, as noted earlier.¹⁰⁵ The first three mechanisms that Fromm explores are symbiosis, authoritarianism, and destructiveness. Each of these leads directly to manifest sadomasochistic outcomes. The last two mechanisms -- orgiastic rituals and herd conformity -- were not explicitly addressed by Fromm as to how they lead to sadomasochistic outcomes. One can see upon closer examination however, that these two social modes of

¹⁰⁵ See page 153 for a brief explanation of the existential needs.

escape can create conditions that engender sadomasochistic dynamics of relatedness.

Fromm's mechanisms of escape provides a comprehensive psychological overview of different individual and social sadomasochistic contexts that are all based on the simple and accessible premises of thrownness, facticity, and existential aloneness. We will start by first looking at the mechanism of escape from aloneness that Fromm associated most directly with sadomasochism as a sexual perversion; namely symbiosis

Symbiosis

The term "symbiosis" is a concept from biology which refers to an association between two or more species that is to their mutual benefit. Symbiosis may also be interpreted as an "excessive or pathological inter-dependence of two persons" (*Stedman's Medical Dictionary*, 2000, p. 1741). As defined below in *Escape from freedom* (Fromm, 1941), Fromm chose the latter psychological interpretation. He wrote:

I suggest calling the aim which is at the basis of both sadism and masochism: *symbiosis*. Symbiosis, in this psychological sense means the union of one individual self with another self (or any other power outside the own self) in such a way to make each lose the integrity of its own self and to make them completely dependent on each other. (pp. 156-157)

As implied above, Fromm's definition of symbiosis as a loss of self-integrity that leads to a dependency on another person re-configured the sexual features of sadism and masochism as a secondary manifestation of a characterological

disturbance based on existential anxieties-- and not *vice-versa* (pp. 149-150). According to Fromm, the erotic nature of sadomasochism is a by-product of symbiotic attachment. In *Escape from Freedom* (Fromm, 1941), he made an argument to supplant the sexual libido theory with his existential conceptualization of symbiosis. Fromm wrote:

I come now to the main question... what is the common root of both the masochistic *and* the sadistic strivings?

. . .Both the masochistic and sadistic strivings tend to help the individual to escape his unbearable feeling of aloneness and powerlessness.

Psychoanalytic and other empirical observations of masochistic perversions give ample evidence...that they are filled with a terror of aloneness and insignificance (p.150)

This passage shows that Fromm's unique existential frame to symbiosis came from his own refined psychoanalytic perspective blended with empirical observations. He concluded that at its core, sadomasochism (i.e., symbiosis) is a flight from the anxiety of aloneness and the ability to love another person (Fromm, 1939, p. 518) which shifted the focus away from a biological sex drive.

When Fromm (1939) first introduced symbiosis, he sketched out two forms: the first type, "masochistic-love", is "the giving up of one's individual self in order to attach to another person who is felt to be stronger" (p. 518); the second is called "sadistic-love" (p. 518) and is defined as the "desire to swallow" another person and turn them into "a will-less instrument in one's own hands" (p. 518).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ According to Fromm (1939), both of these symbiotic pseudo-love types were prominent in mid 20th century Western cultural ideals of romantic love and family "happiness." Based on clinical

According to Fromm, the sadomasochist would rather settle for one or both types of pseudo-love than face the fact of his or her helplessness in the face of death and the factual conditions of separateness from others; by contrast, a healthy person embraces aloneness and is able to love others more fully. Taking Fromm's definition of symbiosis a step further, slavish sexual urges to submit to the will of another person, or to sexually dominate another individual would be viewed by Fromm as different modes of escape with the same existential aim, which is to escape the anxiety that accompanies the factual conditions of existence and the terrors of isolation. While sexual sadomasochism fits easily under the concept of Fromm's symbiosis, it really is just one aspect of "pseudo-love," which also includes emotional, spiritual, and intellectual dependency as intrinsic to its symbiotic processes.¹⁰⁷ We now turn to another mode of escape that Fromm based on the avoidance of existential aloneness. "Authoritarianism" is a social and manifestly non-sexual mode of sadomasochistic expression that Fromm popularized following his introduction of symbiosis.

Authoritarianism

Another original contribution by Fromm that brought even more depth to the understanding of sadomasochism was his analysis of the sadomasochistic

experience and social observations, Fromm cited the systematic debasement of individuality enacted through symbiotic parent-child dynamics in "authoritarian" and "permissive" family structures that were considered "normal" (p. 518). He criticized the tendencies of many long-term term "loving" relationships which switch back and forth between sadistic and masochistic roles in a "struggle for dominance and submission" (p. 518)

¹⁰⁷ It is interesting that for Fromm, consensual validation has no bearing on whether an attachment is symbiotic or healthy (Fromm, 1955, p. 23). Fromm wrote, "Just as there is a "folie à deux" there is a "folie à millions". He espoused the concept of "normative humanism" to explain all of the mechanisms of defense which takes the position that there is a "right and wrong, that is, a satisfactory and unsatisfactory solution to the problems of human existence" (pp. 22-23).

Normative humanism will be discussed in Section D`

individual who becomes an “authoritarian character.” Just as sexual sadomasochism is a distortion of erotic urges as discussed in symbiosis, the desire to dominate the will of other people can be viewed as a depravity of a genuine sense of potency borne out of helplessness, powerlessness, and inferiority. According to Fromm (1972), an underlying “sense of vital impotence” (p. 326) is at the root of the authoritarian character, which is reflected in the seductive influence that hierarchies of power have on the authoritarian individual (Fromm, 1941, p. 166). As Fromm (1941) wrote, “Power fascinates... [the authoritarian] not for any values for which a specific power may stand, but just because it is power. Just as his ‘love’ is automatically aroused by power, so powerless people or institutions automatically arouse his contempt”(p. 166). The most notable characteristic of the authoritarian character is an outward political expression of inward sadomasochistic tendencies. As explained by Fromm (1973) below:

The sadomasochist has also been called the “authoritarian character,” translating the psychological aspect of his character structure into terms of a political attitude. This concept finds its justification in the fact that persons whose political attitude is generally described as authoritarian (active and passive) usually exhibit (in our society) the traits of the sadomasochistic character: control of those below and submission to those above. (p.326)

Fromm shows us in this passage how the authoritarian character, trapped in a dynamic of dominance and submission within hierarchies of unequal power distribution (pp. 142-143), can enact sadistic and/or masochistic tendencies. Both the active and passive forms of authoritarianism stem from the same origin of

primary powerlessness (impotence) that is embedded in the factual conditions of our aloneness and separateness from others in the world. Just like in symbiosis, where the need for primary relatedness and erotic fulfillment are sought through individual pseudo-love attachments that are ultimately unfulfilling, so in authoritarianism, the attachment to someone or something deemed more or less powerful outside the self may temporarily ameliorate the fear of powerlessness in the psyche of the person, but a deeper sense of human vitality and empowerment is sacrificed.

For Fromm, authoritarianism and symbiosis are different modes of sadomasochistic escape from existential aloneness that attempt to resolve our existential needs through pseudo-attachments which offer a temporary respite from the fears of isolation and powerlessness. Both are shown to be inadequate by Fromm as answers to our more human need for relatedness with others. In the next mechanism of escape, as we shall see, Fromm again expanded the parameters of sadomasochism theory by exploring a more sinister and actively violent solution to the problem of existential aloneness.

Destructiveness

“Destructiveness” is the attempt to escape the terror of aloneness by completely annihilating the outside world. Whereas symbiosis and authoritarianism seek to submit to and/or dominate others outside the self, the destructive person wishes to remove all possible threat of needing another by obliterating the feared other-as-object. Destructiveness is related to the need

for transcendence, which is rooted in our very existence.¹⁰⁸ According to Fromm, we all seek to transcend the accidental and passive nature of our given existence. If rooted in love, then our need for transcendence will lead to creative activity that is productive and grounded in freedom.¹⁰⁹ Fromm (1955) noted however, that alongside the need to create out of freedom and love, there co-exists a desire to destroy which can fill our need for transcendence (p. 41). Acts of destructiveness vary according to the social conditions and characteristics of the individual, and can take many forms (Fromm, 1941, p. 178). For example, though warfare may be rationalized as inspired by transcendent values such as love, duty, conscience, or patriotism, it has the potential to be destructive at its core, which again, is embedded in our very existence. On the surface, destructiveness appears to be linked with the same kind of hostility seen in sadistic and masochistic tendencies because of its original escape from the anxieties of separateness. Indeed, it is rooted in the same “unbearableness of individual powerlessness and isolation” (Fromm, 1941, p. 177). But, unlike ordinary sadomasochistic hostility, which is borne out of a dependency on its object, destructiveness aims at the elimination of its object. The destructive individual seeks to escape powerlessness by destroying any other person or thing that poses a threat to the self. A good example of a destructive personality is Hitler or Stalin. Symbiosis,

¹⁰⁸ The need for transcendence is closely connected with the need for relatedness. It comes from our desire to surpass the accidental and passive conditions of our existence. The urge to transcend leads to an awareness of being created and the desire to create for ourselves (See Fromm, 1955, p. 41).

¹⁰⁹ Examples of creative transcendence include a woman giving birth to an infant, men and women raising children, creating art, creating ideas, planting seeds, and producing material objects.

authoritarianism, and destructiveness are all explicit modes of sadomasochistic escape from aloneness that redefined sadomasochism theory. The next two mechanisms of escape were never explicitly examined by Fromm as having sadomasochistic outcomes, but their connection to sadomasochism is worth noting and easy to overlook.

Herd conformity

The calming, friction-free escape of herd conformity is, for Fromm, another solution to existential aloneness that provides a temporary solution to the need for a sense of identity.¹¹⁰ On the surface, the conformist appears free of complications, operating under the illusion that he or she has self-agency and is a “true individual” (Fromm, 1941, p. 184). Below the surface however, the conformist is participating in the disavowal of their true inner self by accepting the “personality offered to him [or her] by the culture” (p. 184).

The sadomasochistic dynamics that are implicit to conformity emerge from the inherent existential need to have an identity that start with the primary bonds of attachment to parents and nature (Fromm, 1955, p. 62). In our contemporary society, the development of individuality is stressed as desirable. We are taught to think for ourselves without pressure from authority and to believe that we are politically and economically “free.” The hope is that we will experience our freedom as empowering and that this will affect all of our endeavors, but, as Fromm (1955) noted:

¹¹⁰ For a discussion on the relationship of the existential need for an identity and herd conformity see *The sane society* (Fromm, 1955, chap. 2, sect. D)

Many substitutes for a truly individual sense of identity were sought for and found. Nation, religion, class and occupation serve to furnish a sense of identity. "I am an American," "I am a Protestant" (p. 63)

According to Fromm, instead of fostering a real sense of individual identity, the above "formulae...help a man [or woman] experience a sense of identity after the original clan identity has disappeared and before a truly individual sense of identity has been acquired" (p. 63). For this reason, Fromm considered conformist identities such as nationalism and patriotism to be forms of "idolatry [and] insanity" (p. 60) that interfere with the building of a core authentic self that is based on one's own values and a true affirmation of self and others. The consequences are a numbing of the individual's capacity to listen to their own inner convictions and a decline of sincerity in everyday emotional expression. The upshot of conformist cultural pressure is that as the authentic self gives way to the "social self" as the primary mode of self/other relations, pseudo-relationships engendering symbiotic (sodomasochistic) attachments between individuals increase and indirectly establish group authoritarian norms that reinforce sodomasochistic behaviors.¹¹¹

The Orgiastic Solution

Orgiastic rituals provide brief spasmodic relief from loneliness and isolation that allow the individual to fuse with the larger group or with the "cosmos." This mode of escape tends to be intense, transitory, and involves a complete immersion of the self in body, mind, and spirit. Rituals that foster communion with the larger group and a loss of individuality can be traced back to tribal and

¹¹¹ See Section D for a further discussion of the "social self."

ancient religious customs.¹¹² Current examples include rock concerts, large sporting events, political rallies, and certain religious gatherings. As long as orgiastic expressions are a matter of common practice in a society there is no problem with guilt or anxiety. Sadomasochistic tendencies and behaviors like drug abuse, alcoholism, compulsive sex and gambling are more pervasive in cultures that deny some form of sanctioned orgiastic expression (p. 11).

A good example is Fromm's (1970/1992) analysis of the hippie culture which he compared to a religious mass movement that permitted its members to experience unity and solidarity. Fromm interpreted the concert at Woodstock as a kind of pilgrimage for the hippie culture which blossomed into an intense orgiastic ritual of music, drug use, free sexual expression, all with a sense of order and lack of aggressiveness that included an attitude of kindness and helpfulness among its participants. It also served as an escape from the sadomasochistic self-estrangement that comes out of the middle-class emphasis on competition and the worship of technology. The hippie movement provided a temporary haven for thousands; it was intended to be based on a faith in love, equality, peace, and life, which as Fromm predicted, would be short lived due to the power of the established idolatry of mainstream values (Fromm, 1970/1992 pp. 86-87).

As indicated at the end of chapter 4, around the same time that Fromm was asserting a new existential foundation for a psychological theoretical framework

¹¹² Some examples of rituals are prayer offerings, dancing, chanting, insults to evil spirits, and performance of magic acts. Shamans and priests have conducted orgiastic rituals as a treatment for psychological deviance in early Chinese, Egyptian, and Hebrew cultures (Comer, 2001, p. 9).

of sadomasochism, Jean Paul Sartre was writing on sadomasochism as an ontological structure¹¹³ that he considered to be embedded in all human relationships. As a philosopher, Sartre's existential-humanism as it applies to sadomasochism differed significantly from Fromm's psychological existential-humanistic view in many ways. Before conducting a comparative analysis of their respective approaches to sadomasochism, which should prove interesting, an examination of Sartre's ontology of sadomasochistic relations will take place. It will be followed by a review of the work of various post-Sartrean philosophers and psychoanalysts who extended Sartre's ontological version of the sadomasochism discourse to different social contexts.

Section B: An Overview of Sartre's Existential-Phenomenology of Sadomasochistic Relations

In *Being and nothingness* (Sartre, 1943/1956), Jean-Paul Sartre presents a rich phenomenological description of "the look" which reveals three different attitudes of "being-for-others" (chap. 3).¹¹⁴ These three different attitudes lay out Sartre's ontological principles of human relationships which renders all experience possible. According to Sartre, the look refers to the self's experience of "being-seen-by another" (Frie, 1997, p. 52) in the form of a possession (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 475). It pre-supposes the factual existence of a bodily self that is

¹¹³ Ontology was already defined in the Introduction (see p. 16, FN 7). Sartre (1943/1956) also described Ontology as "the study of the structures of being...taken as a totality (pp. 804-805).

¹¹⁴ For Sartre (1943/1956), "being-for-others" is a "new dimension of being in which my Self exists outside as an object for others. The For-others involves a perpetual conflict as each...seeks to recover its own Being by directly or indirectly making an object out of the other" (p. 800).

in an ongoing, non-causal relationship with the body of another person.¹¹⁵ The first attitude of being-for-others is called “love, language, [and] masochism” (p. 474); the second is described as “indifference, desire, hate, [and] sadism” (p. 494). According to Sartre, the third attitude, the “Being-with” (*Mitsein*) -- also called the “We-mode” (p. 534) “could not constitute an ontological structure of human reality...[and is]... “at its origin a metaphysical and contingent fact” (p. 536). Therefore, according to Sartre, the third attitude is derived from the first two (masochistic and sadistic), which he saw as the real ontological structures for human relationships. I will first examine the masochistic and sadistic attitudes before considering the third.

Sartre coined the term the “look” to describe the masochism embedded in the first attitude. The look is what I experience when I become aware of being an object for another person. Up until that point, I am freely engaged as a subject. Once I become aware of the other’s objectifying presence, I am immediately forced to deal with being seen as an object by the other, which I experience as “my being-as-object in shame” (p. 492).¹¹⁶ Below is a further description of the look by Sartre (1943/1956):

The Other’s look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it *is*, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret— the secret of what I am. He makes me be and thereby he

¹¹⁵ According to Sartre (1943/1956), all meaning is constituted through the body (p. 471).

¹¹⁶ Sartre (1943/1956) cites the example of being discovered peeping through a keyhole to capture the experience of “my-being-an-object-as-shame.” The moment of awareness when the self becomes an object-for-the-other is an experience of shame (pp. 349-350).

possesses me, and this possession is nothing other than the consciousness of possessing me. (p. 475)

Sartre's language in this passage is dramatic. The "look" of the other is depicted in oppressive terms, as an inescapable masochistic experience for the self of the observed. Sartre added to the above description "Masochism, like sadism, is the assumption of guilt...due to the very fact that I am an object.... [I] cause myself to be fascinated by my objectivity-for-others....as a species of vertigo...before the abyss of the other's subjectivity" (p. 492). Sartre seems to suggest through his descriptions of the first attitude that the subject can become seduced by the experience of becoming an object for others which can lead to distraction. For this reason, Sartre's ontological description of the first attitude suggests a psychological quality that is embedded in the experience of the self being objectified by another.

In the second attitude (the "look at the look") (p. 495), a shift occurs in self-consciousness. The look at the look entails a move away from being an object-for-the-other by making the other-as-an-object-for-me. Sartre used the terms "indifference, desire, hate [and] sadism" to describe the second attitude and referred to it as a kind of blindness on the part of the subject (or sadist) who disregards the subjectivity of others. He wrote:

I *am* my own blindness with regard to others, and this blindness includes an implicit comprehension of being-for-others; ... I practice then a sort of factual solipsism...I do not even imagine that those people can *look at* me. Of course they have some knowledge of me, but this knowledge does not

touch me... they express what they are, not what I am, and they are the effect of my action upon them. Those "people" are functions. (p. 495)

From this passage, we see that in sadism, a sense of self arises through the negation of another self (Friedman, 1998, p. 66). By negating the subjectivity of others, the sadist reduces the being of another to the level of a function and an extension of his or her own subjectivity which is assumed to be sovereign. For example, the toll booth collector is merely a function who collects my money so I may pass; the waiter is nothing but the function of serving the patrons.

According to Sartre, in the sadistic mode, one does not seek to look past the function that the other serves in relation to the self. Whereas in masochism, the movement is towards the total objectification of the self in the sight of others, in the sadistic attitude, the self abstracts his/her identity into a process of subjectivity that strips others of their subjectivity (Gordon, 1995, p. 19).

As contrasting modes of being-for-others, the masochistic and sadistic attitudes each seek to reclaim the self by directly or indirectly making an object out of the other person (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 800). The consequences of Sartre's both attitudes reveal the person's ongoing struggle of internal conflicts with respect to relating with others. Moreover, neither position is a totalized experience; what the irony for the masochist is that even as he or she wishes to give up self-agency by becoming a total object for another, agency is exercised in the attempt to fix the gaze of the other onto the self. Conversely, the sadist acts as if she/he is hidden from the gaze of others by denying the subjectivity of others. The irony for the sadist however, is the denial of the sadist's dependency

on others to play out his/her sadistic illusion. According to Sartre then, even if one attempts to immerse one's self in the masochistic or the sadistic attitude, an experience of inadequacy remains. As he explains, "like all bad faith it is the state itself which furnishes us with the motive for getting out of it" (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 496).¹¹⁷

The Sartrean attitudes of sadism and masochism do not support mutual sociality in the sense that one's self is affirmed at the same time that another person is affirmed. Both attitudes are present, at least to some degree, in the same individual simultaneously and each attacks mutual sociality between the self and another person from different angles. As sadism strengthens, masochism weakens and vice-versa. According to Sartre, the inability to resolve the dilemma of wishing to avoid becoming an object for others in the first attitude and the counter attempt to objectify the other in the second attitude leads to a "perpetual feeling of lack and uneasiness" which is the distinguishing feature of consciousness that is embedded in the first two attitudes (Gordon, 1995, p. 21).¹¹⁸

Sartre's (1943/1956) third attitude of human relationships, more salutary than the sadistic and masochistic attitudes, is called the being-with (*Mitsein*)

¹¹⁷ According to Sartre (1943/1956), "Bad faith...has in appearance the structure of a falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth" (p. 89). In contrast to a lie, bad faith lacks the dual consciousness of a deceiver and the deceived. Instead, it implies the unity of a single consciousness.

¹¹⁸ There is a similarity between Sartre's masochistic and sadistic attitudes of "being-for-others" and Hegel's (1807) dialectic of the self-consciousness between the master and the slave found in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Both suggest the idea of consciousness as fundamentally alienated. Even though Sartre insists that his existential-phenomenology of human relations is better understood as a "circle" and not as a dialectic (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 474), the similarities with Hegel (1807/1977, p. 111) on this point are striking, nonetheless (Priest, 2000, p. 223; Gordon, 1995, p. 21).

dimension, or the “We-mode” (see pp. 534-537). Here, Sartre is referring to those social experiences where we find ourselves in a form of solidarity with others. In the following description, Sartre (1943/1956) offered a further clarification of the third attitude. He wrote:

In the “we,” nobody is the object. The “we” includes a plurality of subjectivities which recognize one another as subjectivities. Nevertheless, ...this is not the object of an explicit thesis; what is explicitly posited is a common action or the object of a common perception. (p. 535)

As suggested in Sartre’s description, the third attitude is an idea of group consciousness where each subject recognizes other subjects as co-spectators in reference to an external action or perception. In fact, Sartre uses the example of being a spectator at a theatrical performance to illustrate the third attitude (p. 535). For Sartre, it is not necessary that every subject in a group be conscious of the we-mode “in order for me to experience myself being engaged in a ‘we’ with them” (p. 536).

Sartre (1943/1956) made a further distinction between two different types of we-mode. There is an “us-as-object” mode, where I experience myself as part of a collective “they.” Sartre characterized the us-as-object mode as an experience of shame that can be described as a group of “alienated ‘Me’s” (p. 537). A dramatic example is if a well dressed person enters a room full of criminals. There is also a “we-as-subject” mode where the subject can become “engaged with others in a common rhythm” (p. 549). A good example of the “we-as-subject” mode is the experience of a soldier marching along to the cadence of

other soldiers (p. 549). Sartre underscores the notion that the rhythm of the marching soldiers emanates from each individual soldier as opposed to the idea that the rhythm is an “immediate experience of...transcendence” (p. 549). He refers to the we-as-subject mode as a kind of impersonal “double objectivizing apprehension” (p. 549) whereby an object is transcended in common by a group of individuals. In this way, Sartre ruled out the possibility that the group is “an inter-subjective consciousness, nor... parts [of]... a synthetic whole in the manner of [a] collective consciousness” (p. 536).

Sartre did not explicitly differentiate the us-object or the we-as-subject in the third attitude as ontological modes in the same way he defined the first masochistic attitude and the second sadistic attitude of being-for-others. According to Sartre, the third attitude is an “experience...of the psychological order and not the ontological ...[that] in no way corresponds to a real unification” (p. 549). Before comparing and contrasting Sartre’s ontological structure of being-for-others with Erich Fromm’s existential-humanistic perspective of relationships as it concerned their respective theories on sadomasochism, we will first consider various post-Sartrean philosophers and psychoanalysts who made contributions to the history of sadomasochism theory from an existential-phenomenological perspective. With the exception of Medard Boss, who was influenced by the ontology of Heidegger, each of the following existential-phenomenological thinkers are influenced by Sartre’s ontology of being-for-others. Each conducted ontological examinations of sadomasochistic relations in different social contexts that helped transform the understanding of

sadomasochism as a rare sexual perversion into an everyday phenomenon. We start however, with Medard Boss, who like Erich Fromm was interested in sadomasochism from both a theoretical and clinical perspective. Also like Fromm, Boss privileged a theory of human love to explain sadomasochism rather than a theory that privileged sexuality.

Section C: Post-Sartrean Perspectives of Sadomasochism

Medard Boss's Daseinsanalytic Approach to Sadomasochism

Medard Boss was a psychoanalyst who explored all of the sexual perversions from a perspective informed by Martin Heidegger's (1927/1962) existential-phenomenology set forth in *Being and time*, which Boss called *Daseinsanalyse*.¹¹⁹ Like Erich Fromm, Boss objected to the reductionism in Freud's libido theory and he de-centered the sexual drive as the core disturbance in his theory of the sexual perversions. Boss (1947/1949) developed a qualitative conceptualization of love as a "norm-conformable reality" (p. 35), which was unhampered by statistical notions of normalcy. Boss viewed love as a "dual-mode of existence'. . . [that]. . .overcomes all anxiety, narrowness, meaninglessness and nothingness. . .[and] reaches its maximum of possibilities in the loving communion of 'You and I'" (p. 33). When a person realizes love according to Boss, he or she is able to surmount the restrictions imposed by the physical-mental barriers of human existence and participate in the "super world infinity of the human mind and soul" (p. 36). Boss also viewed love as taking

¹¹⁹ The literal translation of *Daseinsanalyse* means "the analysis of being there" (Cohn, 1997, p. 4).

place in the sphere of impulses and partakes in the widening and overcoming of earthly boundaries (p. 36). Boss described a person who loves as being at total peace with one's self, devoid of any intentions. In the concrete reality of everyday living however, people are confined to varying degrees by egoistic pettiness, or what Boss referred to as a "fear-laden existence" (p. 37).

As a sexual perversion, sadomasochism is based on fear, which Boss described as the "ontological antithesis of love" (p. 92). By this statement, he meant to suggest that at the core of the disturbance of love and sex in sadomasochism is an "isolated, autocratic, petty and fear-laden individual" (p. 37), who attempts to have others conform to his/her will. Boss believed that authentic love can overcome the egoistic pettiness and fears that enable sadomasochistic behavior. The case study of E.K., a 36 year old single male with "pronounced sadistic behavior" (p. 79) shows how the client's experience, rather than any preconception by Boss led him to the analysis of *Dasein* in the psychotherapy with his sadomasochistic client (see Boss, 1963, p. 4). Below, Boss cites E.K. in his own words:

Each time when I really crave something, I must force it, break it open. I live among opposing clods, and I am a clod myself. My reason for forcing a woman into physical submission is that I myself never had any direct relationship to another human body, neither to my own body nor to the body of a woman. I could never recognize flesh as something alive. (p. 87)

The self-description offered by E.K. in the above passage discloses how E.K.'s experience of sadistic intentions is a more complex and vulnerable human

experience than is commonly realized. One gets a first-hand sense of E.K. being cut-off from others and himself in a perceptual and bodily manner that has profound emotional consequences. Boss understood sadomasochism to be the result of “specific concealments and restriction of possibilities for loving” (Boss, 1963, p. 186) others, which affects one’s entire being-in-the-world. As E.K.’s words show, he does not feel connected to his own body and feels alienated from the body of a woman. Boss allows E.K.’s poignantly expressed self-descriptions to indicate how sexual sadomasochism is a way of being-in-the-world that conceals a fundamental desire to be social and how the body is the primary conduit through which the experience of self and others takes place (Boss, 1972, p. 101). Sexual sadomasochism, when understood through Boss’s daseinsanalytic perspective is revealed as a much more profound experience than as a need to sexually dominate or to be sexually overpowered by another person. Boss dignifies E.K.’s struggle to overcome his sadomasochism and rid himself of the need to use violence in order to achieve sexual union with his partner. In the quote below, Boss never loses sight of E.K.’s desire to love and connect with others that is buried within him. Boss finds E.K.’s common humanity underneath his sadomasochistic inclinations. Boss wrote:

If [E.K.] would have been purely a hating person, he would have felt nothing else but life-opposing barriers in the concrete forms of the world... Factually, [a] depth of love was buried to him and hidden from behind...obstacles in his clod like world, but ...still accessible...in contrast to the all-hating, all destroying person (p. 94).

Boss assumes that love and hate are the core components of E.K.'s sadomasochism rather than the sexual instincts. By stressing E.K.'s sadomasochistic impulses as a conflict between love and hate, Boss normalized the deeper existential human needs that are being frustrated in sexual sadomasochism.

The brief passages selected from Boss's case study of E.K. demonstrate how a daseinsanalytic approach reveals the realities of human love and the existential need to be connected with another person as the core disturbances behind acts of sexual sadomasochism. One can see that an interpretation based on an intrapsychic sexual libido would not be able to access the level of depth and human distortion that the sadomasochist's way of being-in-the-world is affected when compared with Boss's daseinsanalytic therapeutic model. One sees how Boss's approach was centered on the self-descriptions of his client's experience as well.

It should be noted that Boss's theory of love was problematic and fell prey to many of the modern moralisms embedded in other theories of sadomasochism during his time. For example, Boss espoused the heterosexual union of two independent personalities as "love's fullest expression" (p. 36), which is highly reminiscent of Krafft-Ebing's originally biased "golden standard" of healthy sexual behavior.¹²⁰ Boss later dropped his theory of love after becoming a student of Heidegger, who never endorsed the idea of love as a dual-mode of existence. Boss however, continued to refine an effective daseinsanalytic psychotherapeutic

¹²⁰ Another curiosity of Boss's conceptualization of love was his spiritual notion of "You and I," which he envisioned as a "oneness," and which he depicted as a male and female essence, similar to Jung's intrapsychic images of the "animus" and "anima" (Boss, 1947/1949, p. 31).

model for the treatment of sadomasochism but without a theory of love attached to it (see Boss, 1963, chap. 11).

Beauvoir's Use of the Master/Slave Dynamic in 'The Second Sex'

Simone De Beauvoir scrutinized the realities and myths surrounding the lives of women in *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 1949/1989). Beauvoir used disparate methodologies from literature, biology, history and philosophy to examine the problems that confront women and took particular aim at the way psychoanalysis consigns the role of the feminine. One sees the influence of Sartrean ontology in Beauvoir's analysis of existence and the role of women in psychoanalysis.

Referring to the psychoanalysts of her generation, Beauvoir wrote:

In the sense in which the psychoanalysts understand the term, "to identify oneself" with the mother or with the father is to *alienate oneself*...to prefer a foreign image to the spontaneous manifestation of one's own existence, it is to play at being. Woman is shown to us as enticed by two modes of alienation. Evidently to play at being a man will be for her a source of frustration; but to play at being a woman is also a delusion: to be a woman would mean to be the object, the *Other* — and the Other nevertheless remains subject in the midst of her resignation. (p. 51)

Beauvoir's analysis, as seen above, may be considered as an existential critique of the gender bias that suffused modern psychoanalysis. According to Beauvoir, the way psychoanalysis understood identity engendered self-alienation because of the assumption that the self had to prefer an outside image (either mother or father) to establish an identity. For women, as Beauvoir viewed it, the problem of

identity presents a twofold mode of alienation because masculinity is the only identity that can reach self-transcendence. For example, if a young girl identifies with her father, there is the obvious inherent problem of being female, which is a source of frustration. However, the alternative of identifying with the mother is just as problematic because, according to Beauvoir, to be female is to be implicitly denied the possibility of transcending one's circumstances, which afforded only to the male. Therefore, a woman learns to resign herself to the role of the other as proscribed by the culture because there is no clearly defined role for a woman other than not being a male.

Beauvoir's assertion of otherness for women further stresses the themes of dominance and submission.¹²¹ For example, she clarifies the important distinction between the psyche of a woman who chooses to become an objectified "thing," or other in the eyes of the male - - what she calls *true* masochism - - and the erotic value of physical pain, which does not necessarily entail passive submission and has no greater place in female sexuality than it has for male sexuality (Beauvoir, 1952/1989, p. 398). Beauvoir also spoke out against the "bad faith"¹²² gendered binarisms that were historically embedded in psychoanalysis and in the model of sadomasochism during her era. In the passage below, she critiques the hetero-normative construction of

¹²¹ The themes of Beauvoir's examination of how women experience dominance and submission can be traced back to Hegel's master/slave dialectic that Sartre (1941/1956) also used in *Being and Nothingness*. Another influence on Beauvoir's analysis comes from Merleau-Ponty's notions of bodily existence and her work anticipates the post-phenomenological ethical views of Emmanuel Levinas (Barber, 2001, pp. 71-77).

¹²² See Section B, page 170, FN 125 for a definition of bad-faith.

sadomasochism theory embedded in psychoanalytic thought that tends to render the feminine as invisible. She wrote:

The sexual role of woman is largely passive; but the actual performance of that passive part is no more masochistic than the normal aggressive behavior of the male is sadistic; woman can transcend caresses, excitement, and penetration, toward the attainment of her own pleasure, thus upholding her subjectivity; she can also seek union with her lover and give herself to him, which represents transcendence of self and not abdication. (p. 399)

What is remarkable about Beauvoir's critique is how she advocates a non-pathological and affirmative sense of feminine sexuality and agency. Beauvoir also shows in the above passage that she rejected the male/aggressive /sadist conflation alongside the myth of female passivity which were both embedded in the popular imagination of sadomasochism theory from a psychoanalytic perspective.

Beauvoir was critical of the "pathology of normalcy"¹²³ embedded in psychoanalytic thought as it pertained to sadomasochism during her era. She pointed out how male sadism and female masochism are both exercises in bad-faith because both ideas perpetuate the privileging of male transcendent values as the standard for human behavior. As she accurately declared, "among the psychoanalysts in particular...man is defined as a human being and women as a female—whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male" (p. 52). In concurrence with Erich Fromm (1934), Beauvoir (1952/1989)

¹²³ The "pathology of normalcy" is an idea developed by Erich Fromm (1955) which will be discussed in Section D, p. 189

also questioned bourgeois society's defense of the rights of women as an abstraction while the concrete reality of women's economic dependence on men continued (p. 93).

According to Beauvoir, "true" masochism involves the splitting of one's consciousness between an interior sense of self and the ego, which becomes disembodied in masochism as if it were a double or a "stranger." As Beauvoir (1952/1989) wrote, "Masochism exists only when the *ego* is set up as separate and when this estranged self, or double, is regarded as dependent upon the will of the others" (p. 399). Beauvoir was able to humanize masochism by amplifying its universal existential themes and by exposing the cultural biased attitude towards women.

Below is an example of how Beauvoir was able to capture the essence of the masochistic experience beyond the superficialities of gender and even the restrictions of biology. She wrote:

Masochism exists when the individual chooses to be made purely a thing under the conscious will of others, to see herself as a thing under the conscious will of others, to see herself as a thing, to play at being a thing.

"Masochism is an attempt not to fascinate the other by my objectivity, but to be myself fascinated by my objectivity in the eyes of the other. (p. 399).

Beauvoir's insight is remarkable throughout her exploration of masochism and she should be considered as an important figure in the history of sadomasochism theory. Her critique of the psychoanalytic paradigm revealed the hegemony of gender oppression that had been embedded in the sadomasochistic discourse

going back to Krafft-Ebing. I do not think that this can be understated. By uncovering the “bad-faith” assumptions implicit the notion of gender differences in 20th century Western culture, particularly as it pertained to masochism, Beauvoir was more persuasive than any other thinker of her time in demystifying the distorted image of the female as a passive masochist and the male as an aggressive sadist.

Africana Existentialism: Franz Fanon’s “Fact of Blackness”

Franz Fanon was an important theorist in the African struggle for liberation in the 20th century. Fanon was a psychiatrist who was interested in Sartre’s ontology of human relationships as it applied to his experience of being a black man in a white world. Fanon’s reaction to Sartre’s moral indictment of whites, which is quoted below from *Black orpheus* (Sartre, 1948/2001) served as a springboard to Fanon’s own phenomenological inquiry into the existence of blackness. Sartre posed the following question to whites on the issue of white racism:

When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for? That they would sing your praises? Did you think that when they raised themselves up again, you would read adoration in their eyes of these heads that our fathers had forced down to the very ground? (p. 115)

For Fanon, Sartre’s question to other whites concerning their treatment of blacks denies the voice of the black man. Sartre’s question expresses a classic liberal sentiment that focuses on white guilt rather than on the black man’s experience, which Fanon understood as being missed by Sartre.

Fanon's answer to Sartre's question, quoted below from *Black skin, white masks* (Fanon, 1967), exposes the subtle yet powerful weakness in Sartre's position. Fanon wrote:

I do not know; but I say that he who looks into my eyes for anything but a perpetual question will have to lose his sight...and if I cry out it will not be a black cry. No, from the point of view adopted here, there is no black problem. Or...if there is one it concerns the whites only accidentally. (p. 29)

One sees in Fanon's reply to Sartre, that Fanon understood Sartre's morally compromised position. According to Fanon, the black man's experience can never be addressed when posed as a white problem because of the implicit assumption that whiteness is the only perspective of subjectivity that can render the black man's experience intelligible. If we recall Sartre's second attitude of human relationships for a moment, it becomes clear that the question Sartre posed to other whites in *Black Orpheus* (1948/2001) is presented from a sadistic perspective. By assuming whiteness as the privileged perspective from which to understand the black man's experience, Sartre problematized the situation of the black man for white culture. As Fanon correctly noted, Sartre was oblivious to his own bad-faith assumption of subjective sovereignty (Gordon, 1995, p. 23).

Fanon (1967) exposed the toxic consequences of whiteness as an inherently sadomasochistic position for the black man from multiple vantage points. His complex self-analysis of his desire to attach to a white woman is an excellent example of how black accommodation to white values can be a form of cultural symbiosis involving a complicated web of master/slave dynamics. In the

passage quoted below, one sees through the eyes of Fanon how the sadistic world of whiteness grants full privileges to the white male while objectifying the white female and rendering the black man invisible. Fanon wrote:

Out of the blackest part of my soul, across the zebra striping of my mind, surges this desire to be suddenly *white*.

I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*.

Now— and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged— who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love.

I am loved like a white man.

Her love takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization....

I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. (Fanon, 1967, p. 63)

Fanon's self-analysis, as depicted above, suggests that being black in a white world can be an inherently split form of masochism, whereby the authentic self is split from the external ego of being seen as "black" by the white other. As Fanon (1967) declared, "for not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (p. 110). One can see how forceful Fanon's analysis of the look was and how it shed new light on the thrown nature of non-reciprocal black and white power relations in contemporary culture. Fanon's exploration of blackness is a historically significant extension of Sartre's analysis of the look which revealed whiteness as a form of a pathology of normalcy can be inherently sadomasochistic.

Section D: Contrasting Fromm with Sartre and Post-Sartrean Perspectives

At this point, I ask the reader to pause and take a step back for a minute to consider how far we have come in this theoretical narrative on the discourse of sadomasochism. We began with Krafft-Ebing's classification of two rare sexual perversions and moved towards the de-centering of sexuality as the core impulse behind sadomasochism. Then, primarily based on a comparative analysis among the perspectives of Freudian psychoanalysis, the existential-humanistic orientation of Erich Fromm, and Jean-Paul Sartre's ontology of sadomasochistic relations, we saw how sadomasochism was transformed from the notion of a rare sexual perversion into a phenomenon that takes place in everyday life and in multiple contexts. In this last section of chapter 5, I will turn to a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between Fromm's and Sartre's theoretical perspectives of sadomasochism.

Similarities

The Rejection of the Sexual Libido as the Core of Sadomasochism

Fromm clearly situated the sexual instinct secondary to the instincts for self preservation (Fromm, 1932/1970c, p. 140). His overview of the human passions espoused sexuality as a flexible and postponeable urge among rival urges that also clamor for fulfillment. According to Fromm, the need for love, power, sadism, and the desire to submit to a greater power outside of oneself co-exist on the same psychological plane as the need for sensual and erotic fulfillment (Fromm, 1941, p. 15; 1955, chap. 3).

A similar de-centering of the sexual passion is seen in Sartre's existential analysis of being.¹²⁴ According to Sartre (1943/1956), all sexuality -- "*my being-sexed and his being-sexed*" (p. 500) -- is an external feature of the desire to transcend another person or object. For Sartre, it is the desire to possess the other or to be possessed by the other that reveals the other's sex to me. While sex may accompany one's desire for the other, according to Sartre sex is not posited in any thematic way (p. 501). As Sartre viewed it, the sexual act is actually a temporary release from desire (p. 500). We can now see how for both Sartre and Fromm sexuality is subsumed under a broader and more complex theoretical vision of the human passions than the material monism implicit to the libido theory.

One finds the contrivance of material monism absent in the theoretical explanations of sadomasochism by Fromm and Sartre also. Both perspectives present sadomasochism as emerging from a *thrown* situation of human existence that excludes any reference to contradictory aims of biological instincts consistent with any stage of Freud's libidinal theories. In Fromm's (1939) theory of symbiosis, for example, the self seeks an attachment to another person-as-object who appears stronger and/or weaker based on the inability to withstand the anxiety of one's aloneness. In Sartre's first two attitudes of being-for-others, sadomasochism is articulated as an imbalance in human power relations based

¹²⁴ According to Sartre (1943/1956), existential analysis is a method which seeks to uncover a person's "original project," which is the desire to become someone or something. One cannot reduce the existential project to a behavioral empiricism or a system of classification system based on the libido theory. According to Sartre, each person's original project is part of the ontological structure of "being-for-itself," which includes "being-for-others," also referred to as the attitudes of sadism and masochism (p. 474).

on the desire to possess the other and/or to be possessed by the other. In both schemas, sex is a secondary attribute that is non-essential to explicate sadomasochistic processes.

As a corollary of each theorist's rejection of the libido theory, both avoided privileging heredity and/or environmental factors as causative agents. At the same time however, both attempted to synthesize the influences of historical and social factors in their existential perspectives (Fromm, 1941, p. 296; Priest, 2001, p. 4; Burston, 2003, p. 166). We can see then, that each theorist's rejection of a biological instinct theory of human behavior not only de-centered sexuality as the primary passion for sadomasochism, but their respective focus on the social aspects of existence had important implications for the conceptualization of human subjectivity as it concerns sadomasochism theory, to which we now turn.

Agreement on the Unsuitability of the Natural Sciences as a Basis for Human Subjectivity

Alongside of Fromm's and Sartre's respective approaches towards their theories of sadomasochism, each developed a configuration of human subjectivity that left behind the Freudian ego and rules of natural science. Fromm understood the implausibility of deploying natural science principles to illuminate the qualities of the human subject (Burston, 2003, pp. 164-165). He was one of the first psychoanalysts to reject the tripartite schema of the id, ego, and super-ego as an adequate model for the interpretation of individual subjectivity. Fromm (1941) argued that the Freudian model was too simplistic because it assumes that whatever part of consciousness does not belong to the

id and superego is left for the ego to claim (p. 296). Fromm called for an articulation of socio-historic-economic conditions that envelop the individual in a clinical context (Burston, 2003, p. 166) which de-emphasized the analysis of intra-psychic aims to elucidate individual subjectivity.¹²⁵

In Sartre's presentation of the subject any model of conscious reflection such as the Freudian model of the id, ego, and superego is an inadequate template for self-consciousness because the subject is incapable of grounding his/her own being through a self-relation (Frie, 1997, p. 35). Sartre separated human subjectivity (or the self) into three basic modes of self-consciousness;¹²⁶ the pre-reflective, the reflective (which can also be called ego consciousness), and a "pure" or ideal reflective state of consciousness (Barnes, 1980/1993, pp. 41-48).¹²⁷ The second mode of personal consciousness (i.e., the self as ego) is of particular interest because it highlights the ontological difference in Sartre's approach from Freud's cultural anthropological approach, which was the accepted natural scientific model of the ego. For Sartre, the ego is a personal consciousness that allows one to distinguish one's own self among other selves (p. 43). It is what is called "I" or "me" in popular usage, and what is typically identified with a natural attitude (p. 43). For Sartre however, the personal mode of consciousness is not to be viewed as independent from absolute self-consciousness. According to Sartre, the ego imposes a unity of present-time

¹²⁵ It should be pointed out that Fromm's concept of social processes went beyond the idea of historical factors and class consciousness. Fromm called attention to the culturally specific rules of language and logic that impact human subjectivity by creating "filters" or templates through which reality is interpreted (Burston, 2003, p. 166).

¹²⁶ For Sartre, every form of consciousness is self-consciousness (Barnes, 1980/1993, p. 42).

¹²⁷ While Barnes (1980/1993) adds a fourth category called "embodied consciousness" she notes that for Sartre all consciousness is embodied (p. 49).

orientation on all future and past intentional acts which includes mental and emotional objects of reflective consciousness. Within this structure, the Freudian ego comprises only a small portion of what Sartre considered to be the realm of personal consciousness.

In their respective theories of sadomasochism, both Fromm and Sartre represent subjectivity as involving an experience of alienation from others. For Fromm, each individual is confronted with a sense of separateness that must be overcome. For Sartre, alienation is always present and is captured in the experience of shame whenever confronted with another person. Although there are critical important differences in how these two existential thinkers approach the concept of alienation of the self in their respective theoretical perspectives of sadomasochism, they both took a dialectical approach towards the understanding of the self, which is always situated in relation to others. For Sartre (1941/1956), the look is an examination of the conflict that the self experiences with other people which presupposes the facticity of a body that renders all consciousness (subjectivity) intelligible. For Fromm, sadomasochism is a subjective experience of fusion of the self of one individual with another borne out of the fear of facing aloneness. Another convergent feature of each thinker's views on subjectivity is found in their mutual resistance to the "pathology of normalcy," which will now be considered.

Fromm's and Sartre's Resistance to the Pathology of Normalcy

Fromm and Sartre both recognized that human subjectivity is not depicted through models based on statistical normalcy. While standards of normalcy can

minimize inner and interpersonal conflict, existential-humanists such as Fromm and Sartre consider freedom and human relationships to be matters related to the quality of life that defy reductions to statistical formulae. Fromm (1955) coined the term “pathology of normalcy” to make the controversial claim that a society as a whole can be sick or “insane” insofar as it does not address the existential needs which are vital to the growth and development of the individual (Burston, 1991, p. 133). According to Fromm, the “normal,” or well adjusted individual who accommodates to the culture at the expense of failing “to attain [their] freedom, spontaneity, [and] a genuine expression of self” (Fromm, 1955, p. 23) is more likely to be crippled from the standpoint of human growth than the person who is diagnosed as a neurotic. As Fromm viewed it, if enough people accommodate to the larger social group by giving up their freedom and spontaneity, sadomasochism can become a pathological group norm by rising to the level of an ideal virtue (p. 23). Ideals based on quantified standards of normalization can engender superficial accommodation to externalized abstract ideas that sacrifice authentic existential needs. Relationships in a “culture of normalcy” could be described as sadomasochistic as they stem from a flight from anxiety that engenders pseudo-attachments which lack sincerity and compassion. When the core self is estranged and supplanted by the need to accommodate to external norms, relationships tend to coalesce around patterns of submission and/or dominance to others. As a countervailing idea, Fromm developed the concept of “normative humanism” to call attention to the difference between a society that fosters growth of the authentic self and enhances loving

relationships from a society that deploys statistical behavioral norms that reinforce accommodation to cultural ideology in terms of content. The latter tends to create obstacles towards the realization of authentic self-love and love for others (chap. 2).

Sartre's remarks on freedom, which are quoted below espouse the same existential-humanistic themes of freedom and relatedness with others that are synchronous with Fromm's concept of normative humanism. Like Fromm, Sartre is critical of cultural standards of normalcy to explain mental illness. As Sartre said:

I...would put freedom first, so that mental illness, or what is known as mental illness, might appear as an aspect of freedom, and not as a disease resulting from a malfunctioning of the brain...within society...one could understand the nature of... madness ...[as] an attitude that prevents a real contact with others and which is nevertheless a consequence of freedom (pp. 38-39).¹²⁸

From this passage, one can see that Sartre, like Fromm considered cultural context to play an important role in the establishment of the psychological well-being of the individual. The two ideas of freedom and positive human contact with others are clearly expressed by Sartre and are the same two notions connected by Fromm in his first explanation of love and symbiotic pseudo-love found in "Selfishness and Self-Love" (Fromm, 1939, p. 518). We see then, that Sartre and Fromm both took a clear existential-humanistic stance towards the concept of mental health in contemporary culture.

¹²⁸ Sartre's remarks are taken from an interview he gave in 1975 explaining his work as it concerned R.D. Laing's anti-psychiatry movement, which Sartre supported (see "Sartre, Laing, and Freud" in *Sartre and psychology*, 1980, pp. 23-39).

Fromm's and Sartre's Rejection of the Psychoanalytic "Spirit of Seriousness"

Both Fromm and Sartre were critical of the "spirit of seriousness"¹²⁹ that was embedded in most natural science and sociological theories of behavior during their time. In existential terms, a "spirit of seriousness" stems from two problematic assumptions that go unexamined in a theory of human behavior. The first problematic assumption associated with a serious attitude in a theory is when values are viewed as having an independent existence outside the realm of human consciousness. Another way of saying this is that a theory embedded in a serious attitude assumes that ideas or values are real objects that exist in the material world. A second problematic feature of a theory that is fixed in a spirit of seriousness is when a theory lacks a method of self-reflexivity towards its own premises. As already mentioned, many of the concepts from psychoanalysis were assumed to be justified from a scientific perspective without ever addressing the speculative nature of their claims. Whenever an assumption in a theory is automatically justified without explanation, a tendency towards "self-importance beyond the scope of judgment" (Gordon, 200, p. 122) can occur.¹³⁰ Another way of expressing this point is that in a serious theory, it is not enough whether an idea is true or not. Its premises *must* be true, or *ought* to be true. A serious theory is a form of bad-faith because it calls for the elimination of reflection and responsibility for deciding whether a theory is viable or not (p. 122).

¹²⁹ Sartre (1941/1956) first coined the term "spirit of seriousness" (*l'esprit de sérieux*) to describe any perspective that views man as an object and subordinates him to the world.

¹³⁰ The Aristotelian and post-Galilean models of scientific values used in the evaluation of natural science theories of sadomasochism are theories presented in "the spirit of seriousness" because both assume that values are abstracted from the laws of the universe which imply an independent world outside the realm of human consciousness. Secondly, both models assume an authoritative posture towards the positing of scientific values which does not consider an evaluation of its own assumptions to be necessary.

An example of an existentialist critique of a serious theory can be seen in Fromm's (1970/1992) criticism of Freud's concept of regression as it relates to the sadomasochistic character perversion. Fromm noted that Freud's concept of regression regarding the anal character syndrome carries a latent value system that "came in through the back door" (Fromm, 1970/1992b, p. 95). There are two versions of regression posited by Freud in his theory of development of the sadomasochistic character. In the first version, regression "is not subject to indignation" (p. 95); that is, while the subject regresses, it is in the service of the psychosexual maturity integrated into the personality of the child, though perverse tendencies remain.¹³¹ The second version posited by Freud, also noted by Fromm, identifies regression as "a failure of development (and hence pathological and undesirable)" (p. 95). In the latter notion of regression, the sadomasochistic perversion is depicted as a subjective transgression that violates the moral order (i.e., sinfulness). In both cases, regression is assumed to be a necessary principle that operates independently and determines the outcome of a normal or abnormal sadomasochistic character. Good and evil are abstracted outside the realm of consciousness and embedded in the concept of regression. It is never questioned whether regression exists or not. It is simply assumed to be a real objective fact that exists in the material world. In this sense, we see that the concept of regression was a theory developed in a spirit of seriousness that was typical during Freud's time.

¹³¹ Heteronormative regression as an acceptable form of perversion was first established by Freud in "A Child is Being Beaten" (Freud, 1919/1962c, pp. 175-204). See chapter 2

Sartre critiqued the inherent lack of reflexivity embedded in many psychoanalytic concepts. One example is Sartre's critique of the ego and the id, which he called a "substitute for the notion of bad-faith, the idea of a lie without a liar" (p. 92). According to Sartre, if we take the attitude that we don't play a central role in the determination of what we call the unconscious then we act as though our fate is not in our own hands (Gordon, 2000, p. 123). If the id is accepted as an idea outside the realm of self-consciousness, then the self is consigned to a helpless dependency on a "thing" (id) outside itself. Therefore, Sartre maintained that "it is not accurate to hold that the "id" is presented as a thing...indifferent to the conjectures we make concerning it" (p. 92).¹³² In a likewise manner, Fromm discouraged dependence on concepts and/or people which disburden the self from having to decide one's own values in life. Fromm's (1970/1992b) theory of sadomasochism stresses the centrality of the subject's ability to provide his or her own authentic answers in life in contrast to the values of others (p. 93). We can see then, that both theorists took the approach that any theory which overrides the individual's anguish of being confronted with the responsibility of making choices in one's own situation is a theory borne out of an attitude of seriousness that distorts the appropriation of the phenomenon in question. Now that these main points of convergence between Fromm's and Sartre's theoretical approaches to sadomasochism have been identified, we can proceed to an examination of their differences.

¹³² Although Sartre was a critic of psychoanalysis, he valued its assumption that all outward manifestations of consciousness are revealing of the "psychic life" and symbols of fundamental structures of the person. For a full discussion see Sartre's "Existential Psychoanalysis" (1941/1956, Part Four, chap. 2, sect. I)

Differences

Sartre's and Fromm's Different Inscriptions of Subjectivity

The inherent conflict embedded in the look has ramifications for Sartre's inscription of the subject. Because the self is locked in an eternal conflict with the other which can never be resolved, the subject (or self) is constituted by Sartre as a perpetual emptiness, or lack motivated by an insatiable desire to subjugate the other (Frie, 1997, p. 57).¹³³ According to Sartre, consciousness, -- which is always "self" consciousness (Barnes, 1980/1993, p. 42) -- is perpetually in search of establishing its own absolute autonomy. Given this intention, whenever the self is confronted with another person, it is thrown into an unavoidable experience of shame. As Sartre said, "Hell is other people" (cited in Priest, 2001, p. 224). Sartre's schematic outline of shame is based on the look: "By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgment on myself as an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other" (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 302).¹³⁴ As one can see, the subject for Sartre is placed in a position of conflict whenever in the presence of another person who becomes an obstacle to be overcome.

On the other hand, we find Fromm espousing the notion of a subject that can realize the fulfillment of its (his/her) existential needs through involvement with others.¹³⁵ According to Fromm (1941) "positive freedom," which is "the

¹³³ Sartre's pessimistic interpretation of subjectivity is repeated in the work of Lacan, who also denied the full possibility of mutual recognition between the self and other. Like Sartre, Lacan emphasizes the perpetual lack and unfulfilled desire of the subject (Frie, 1997, p. 57).

¹³⁴ Sartre's (1941/1956) example of being discovered peeping through a keyhole illustrates how the look of the other is an experience of shame (pp. 347-348).

¹³⁵ See pp. 152-153 of this chapter for an definition of the existential needs

spontaneous activity of the total integrated personality” (p. 257) is possible for everyone.¹³⁶ In contrast to Sartre’s notion of the self as an embodied consciousness, Fromm emphasized the growth of the intellectual, emotional, sensual, and spiritual dimensions of self, all of which are viewed as potentialities that may or may not grow to be realized.¹³⁷ In Fromm’s conceptualization of the self, values, beliefs, and spiritual orientation are all significant dimensions of understanding human existence. With regards to sadomasochism, Fromm points out the dimensions of spiritual beliefs and character values as important areas for assessment (see Fromm, 1970/1992, p. 93).¹³⁸

Fromm and Sartre both viewed interior psychic life and exterior psychic life to be indivisible from each other. However, Fromm’s notion of a “core” self and an exterior social self contrasts with Sartre’s notion of the prereflective, reflective, and the ideal reflective forms of self-consciousness (Barnes, 1980/1993, pp. 42-48). Fromm believed that there is an authentic personal (core) self which reflects the genuine strivings of each individual that can be separated from a social self. For Sartre, ego consciousness (personal self-awareness) is void of any unique

¹³⁶ Fromm’s concept of the self is reminiscent of Abraham Maslow’s theory of self-actualization insofar as both humanists regarded the presence of the self as an innate potential that could be fully realized. What separates the two is Fromm’s historical-anthropological explanation of the self. Both theories have been referred to as “acorn theories of the self” (Barnes, 1980/1993, p. 48).

¹³⁷ Fromm (1964) later referred to a ‘syndrome of growth’ that extended his idea of comprehensive self-development. The syndrome of growth leads to a “love of life, independence, and the overcoming of narcissism as against a ‘syndrome of decay’ formed by love of death, incestuous symbiosis, and malignant narcissism” (p. 13)

¹³⁸ Fromm’s attention to spiritual concerns as part of a clinical assessment was another prescient feature to his work. He anticipated current existential approaches to clinical assessment as seen in the current British school of existential psychotherapy. Van-Duerzen Smith (1988) notes that a person’s connection to the abstract ideas, beliefs, and spiritual themes beyond the self is an important aspect of living that discloses an individual’s world-view and is clinically useful (pp. 96-97; see also Van-Deurzen, 1997, chap 7)

individualizing qualities and is more aptly described as a non-personal form of consciousness (p. 42).

Fromm (1939) argued that the authentic or “real” self has gradually been relinquished in Western civilization throughout the last millenium due to the faulty moral and religious teaching that selfishness is the ultimate evil and that love for others is the highest good (p. 507).¹³⁹ As a result, Fromm believed that the “social self” has been overdeveloped at the expense of the authentic self for most people in contemporary culture to the point of having become a current cultural crisis for the average individual. The term, “pseudo-self” was coined by Fromm to represent the common mode of inauthentic thinking and feeling that supplanted individual sincerity and the exercise of “original acts of thinking, feeling, and willing” (Fromm, 1941, p. 202) in order to capitulate to the ideas of others.¹⁴⁰ For Fromm, in the current climate of self-estrangement from the authentic (core) self, the proliferation of sadomasochistic relationships in everyday life rises concomitantly.¹⁴¹ Clearly Fromm and Sartre differed on their respective inscriptions of the subject. Perhaps, a more revealing difference as it concerns their respective approaches to sadomasochism theory is seen through their configuration of the self/other relationship.

¹³⁹ Fromm (1939) noted that the conceptualization of love for oneself as sin finds its classic expression in Calvin’s theology during the Protestant Reformation. According to Fromm, it was then that the false belief started that “man is essentially bad and powerless” (p. 507) and that a person must give up his or her ability to reason and exercise free choice in order to be pleasing to God.

¹⁴⁰ The pseudo-self is responsible for the automatization of the individual and “the culture of insecurity and helplessness” that has become pervasive among persons in current day living (Fromm, 1941, p. 203). See “herd conformity” in Section A, p. 163 of this chapter

¹⁴¹ Fromm (1941) considered the respect and cultivation of the original “core” self to be the highest achievement of human culture (p. 256).

Sartre's Lack of Intersubjective Reciprocity vs. Fromm's Notion of Intersubjectivity as Mutual Reciprocity

According to Sartre's analysis of the look, intersubjective relations is a project that is doomed to failure because there can never be any mutual or reciprocal recognition between the self and the other. In the look, the only possible outcome is that "slavery becomes a personal and insurmountable human condition" (Frie, 1997, p. 57).¹⁴² According to the look, one can only exist as a master or a slave at any given instant though there is a perpetual switching of roles. I can never stop to recognize my own self in the other person, because the only way I can recognize myself is by negating the other person's presence as a subject for me. For Sartre, one can never escape from living in a perpetual sadomasochistic prison. This renders intelligible his statement that "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 475). Given that the aim of the look is to subjugate the other who has the power to subjugate me, all attempts to meet the other in an intersubjective encounter, results in the loss of my subjectivity.

Fromm (1939) maintains a more optimistic view of self/other relationships. Whereas for Sartre, intersubjectivity rules out the possibility of mutual recognition, for Fromm, the recognition of the self and the recognition of the other are mutual processes co-existing on the same psychological plane. As Fromm asserted, "there is no solidarity of man in which I myself am not included. A

¹⁴² Although Sartre's look assumes the same Hegelian structure of the dialectic between the master and slave, Sartre ends up pessimistically concluding that the opposition between the self and the other can never be reconciled. For Hegel on the other hand, the dialectic of the master and slave moves towards synthesis in the full mode of mutual recognition of self-consciousness at the higher level of reason (Frie, 1997, pp. 56-57)

doctrine which proclaims such an exclusion proves its objective insincerity by this very fact" (p. 517).

Fromm considered faulty moral and religious teaching to be responsible for the idea in psychology that self-affirmation is antithetical to the affirmation of the other. The idea that "it is virtuous to love others [while] it is sinful to love oneself" goes far back in the history of Western thought (Fromm, 1956, p. 57). This distorted moral axiom has become embedded in popular consciousness through education, literature, movies, and other forms of social suggestion (Fromm, 1939, p. 510). As a countervailing argument, Fromm contested that the true meaning of the biblical passage "Love thy neighbor as thyself" means that "the discovery of myself is inseparably connected with the discovery of any other self" (p. 513).¹⁴³ He further translates this spiritual message into a corollary principle of psychology that may be stated in the following way: "not only others, but also we ourselves are the object of our feelings and attitudes; the attitude towards others and towards ourselves, far from being contradictory, runs basically parallel" (p. 513). Fromm has an answer for Sartre, who is caught in a never ending battle of trying to master the other while attempting to escape being dominated by the other at the same time. Fromm's answer is to simply look into the face of the other and to recognize that self-recognition is taking place at the same instant that the other is being recognized. Whereas Sartre schematizes this as a

¹⁴³ Fromm's model of reciprocal self/other relationships is highly synchronous with Martin Buber's philosophy of "genuine dialogue" (Buber, 1965, pp. 75-78).

conflict, for Fromm, the self's ability to be present to the other is an important moment of self-discovery that can offer joy and hope as well as conflict.

The difference between a non-reciprocal notion of intersubjectivity and an intersubjective perspective that endorses mutual reciprocity between the self and the other holds profound significance for a theory of sadomasochism which can now be explored. In my Conclusion, I will examine the different conceptualizations of love as proposed by Freud, Sartre, and Fromm, which is an extension of their respective configurations of intersubjective relations. I will argue that each theorist's conceptualization of love is most intimately connected to their respective views on sadomasochism. I will also suggest that Fromm's theory of love based on the notion of existential aloneness and the explication of sadomasochistic pseudo-love offers a concise and comprehensive understanding of sadomasochistic enactments that is simultaneously a practical insight that resists sadomasochism. I will further contend that Fromm's theory of love and sadomasochistic pseudo-love should be considered as part of the contemporary psychoanalytic discourse on sadomasochism theory instead of being overlooked. It was Fromm's ability to articulate a grounded theoretical framework of human love based on the idea of separateness and the desire for a meaningful connection with other people that was truly prescient during his era. Fromm brought clarity to the understanding of sadomasochism as more than a sexual perversion. When contrasted with the theoretical approaches of Sartre and Freud on the concept of love, Fromm's theory offered hope and the insight that productive loving relationships are the best protection against conditions that lead to sadomasochistic pleasures derived from the exaltation of power. I will begin with a

summary of the two major themes that have emerged from my examination of the sadomasochism theories reviewed in this dissertation and introduce some findings by more recent theorists of sadomasochism which are highly convergent with Fromm's insights which he wrote about over a half century ago.

CONCLUSION

Fromm's Concept of Love as a Response for Sadomasochism

The history of sadomasochism theory is a cautionary tale that has an important message for psychology not only as a theory, but clinically as well. One of the central ideas concerning sadomasochism that I have concluded after conducting this study is that the degree of pleasure derived from the destructiveness of sadomasochistic enactments extends beyond the sexual act—as it so often is portrayed. Moreover, there is a strong argument to be made based on a review of the case studies and theories of sadomasochism examined in this dissertation that there is essentially an inverse relationship between the presence of sadomasochistic attachments and the reality of love as a freely chosen human commitment. If this is the case, then a critical examination of our conceptualizations of love as it concerns sadomasochism should be a priority.

As was alluded to in Chapter 5, I argue that Erich Fromm has developed the most grounded framework for a theory of strong loving relationships that can be contrasted with its fallen state, what Fromm referred to as sadomasochistic pseudo-love. Fromm (1939, pp. 507-523) called for a theory of love when he critically examined contemporary pseudo-love substitutes that he identified as masochistic-love and sadistic-love. Although Fromm made his call more than a half century ago, the commonly held conflation of sadomasochism, sexuality, gender norms, and aggression has yet to be dislodged from the contemporary imagination within psychology, psychoanalysis, and post-modern theories of sadomasochism. Yet, as can be demonstrated in two recent psychoanalytic

reviews of sadomasochism by Jessica Benjamin (1988) and Franco DeMasi (2003), however, there is a growing awareness of sadomasochism beyond the parameters of gendered norms, sexuality, and themes of aggression. Benjamin (1988), for example, notes that Freud's concept of aggression has created an "impasse for social thought" (p. 4) on sadomasochism and suggests that the problem should be reconfigured as "an extension of the bonds of love" (p. 5). De Masi (2003), a more recent psychoanalytic theorist of sadomasochism differentiates between sadomasochism as an unconscious form of sexualized pleasure attached to destructiveness (what he refers to as evil), and other forms of sadomasochism where the inability to love and the perception of hate is more explicit (chap. 14). Both of these theorists' findings suggest that a conceptualization of the power of strong and healthy relationships as is seen in Erich Fromm's theory of love enhances the understanding of sadomasochism and offers direction in preventing sadomasochistic attachments. One can argue that Freud has provided the basis for a new theory of sadomasochism that emphasizes loving relationships.

Despite his continued focus on the libido theory, Freud was the first to notice that sadomasochism may be connected to something other than sexual desire. In "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1915/1962h, pp. 243-258), he noted that the introjection of the loved person as a "good-object" is key in overriding interpersonal sadomasochistic acts, which can occur at various points along the process of mourning a loved one (p. 251). Freud contrasted the successful introjection of the "good-object," which occurs in normal grief through the help of

others, from melancholia, where the subject is not conscious of what has been lost. The melancholic takes refuge in the unconscious satisfaction derived from enactments of sadomasochistic destruction. Though Freud did not make a direct connection with his theory of sadomasochism from his findings in “Mourning and Melancholia,” it is one of the first references in the history of sadomasochism theory to suggest that strong relationships are needed to deal with life’s contingencies and may, in fact, protect us from sadomasochistic attachments.

Despite the aforementioned observations, Freud, was uncomfortable with a conceptualization of love that was not framed in mechanistic terms, that is, as a zero-sum game. Although he refers to the notion of love, he treated the idea with a hermeneutics of suspicion that becomes apparent in the following example. In “On Narcissism” (Freud, 1914/1962k, pp. 67-102) Freud described love as “a certain reciprocity between the ego-libido and the object-libido. The more that is absorbed by the one, the more impoverished does the other become. The highest form is seen in the state of being in love” (p. 33). In this binary schematic representation of love offered by Freud, we see that his theoretical construction of love implies a self (as ego) that is in a decidedly *non-reciprocal* relationship with the external other (as object). Another way of stating this is that in Freud’s self/other construction of love, the ego and the external object are never on the same psychological plane.

Freud’s utilitarian notion of reciprocity was noted by Erich Fromm (1939) in “Selfishness and Self-Love” (pp. 512-513). Fromm commented on the lack of

mutual reciprocity between the self and the outside world in Freud's theoretical construction of love. Fromm (1939) wrote:

According to Freud, there is almost a mechanical alternative between ego-love and object love. The more I turn toward the outside world the less love I have for myself, and vice-versa. Freud is thus moved to describe the phenomenon of falling in love as an impoverishment of self-love because all love is turned to an object outside of itself. (pp. 512-513)

As Fromm's commentary suggests, Freud's conceptualization of love precluded the possibility that self-love and love for others could be viewed as mutually reciprocal processes. Fromm noted that Freud replicated a definition of love that is embedded in the idealistic philosophy of Kant that has pervaded Western cultural thought on love since the time of Calvin (p. 508).¹⁴⁴ Fromm's notion of love provides a sharp contrast and a way out of this utilitarian view of love.

Fromm's notion of love implies that self-love and a love for others are mutually reciprocal processes, rather than the zero-sum game described by Freud. Using the premise of a mutually reciprocal concept of love, Fromm reasoned that, "not only others, but we ourselves are the 'object' of our feelings and attitudes" (Fromm, 1956, p. 59). For Fromm, it was a psychological principle that the process of self-awareness is indivisible from awareness of other people. Furthermore, one's own self is as much an object-recipient of love as another person is an object-recipient of one's love (p. 60). Fromm argued that most

¹⁴⁴ According to Fromm (1939), while there are fundamental differences between Calvin's theology and Kant's philosophy their basic attitude towards love and self-love are the same. For Kant, it is a virtue to want the happiness of others while to want one's own happiness is ethically indifferent (p. 508).

Western thinkers however, like Freud, did not ascribe to the notion that self-love and love for another person are mutually reciprocal processes because of the historical conflation between the ideas of self-love and “selfishness” (p. 60). For centuries, Western culture has been pervaded by a taboo against selfishness. Selfishness has been considered an evil that is antithetical to the idea of love for others, which is acknowledged as the highest good. According to Fromm (1939), selfishness is commonly viewed as co-terminous with self-love (p. 507).¹⁴⁵ Fromm (1956) argues however, that far from being identical inclinations, selfishness and self-love are in fact, opposites (p. 60). It is not that the selfish person loves himself/ herself too much Fromm argues, but rather, it is the case that the selfish, that is, narcissistic individual does not love himself/herself enough, thereby enacting a form of pseudo-love. In the narcissistic presentation, there is, in fact, an absence of real self-love that is often portrayed as loving oneself too much, thereby creating vulnerability to sadomasochistic enactments through excessive displays of dominance over others and/or through acts of submissive identification to those who appear to wield power over others.

There are two additional significant points of difference worth examining between Fromm’s reciprocal notion of self-love and love for others as it compares with Freud’s non-reciprocal formula. The first point is that Fromm’s notion of self-love and love of another is based on the principle of indivisibility, which can also be referred to as a sense of “oneness.” By indivisibility, Fromm meant that one’s own self awareness is impossible to separate from the

¹⁴⁵ The view that selfishness is an evil and synonymous with self-love can be traced to Calvin’s description of self-love as “a pest” and his depiction of man as essentially bad and powerless (Fromm, 1939, p. 507).

awareness of other people. The second important point that separates Fromm's approach to the conceptualization of love and self-love from Freud's idea is that Fromm uses *paradoxical* logic to explain love while Freud remained within the framework of *Aristotelian* logic whenever discussing the concept of love.¹⁴⁶

If we take Fromm's (1956) idea of oneness, which can be stated as "That which is one is one. That which is not-one, is also one" (p. 68), the difference between both types of logic may be illustrated. Using Aristotelian logic, only the first statement ("that which is one is one") of the two-statement axiom can make sense. The second sentence -- "that which is not-one, is also one"-- must be rejected as a negation of the first statement. The second statement is also nonsensical as a statement on its own terms from an Aristotelian point of view. If however, one uses paradoxical logic to appropriate the axiom, "That which is one is one. That which is one is not one," there is no problem. Embracing the opposite ideas is viewed as harmonious and in balance with the principle of all existence.

For Freud, the idea of oneness was problematic. In "Civilization and its Discontents" (Freud, 1930/1962a, pp. 59-145), Freud admitted that a sense of "oneness" was difficult for him to grasp. Writing about the oceanic feeling of oneness described by the poet, Romain Rolland, Freud (1930/1962a) stated that,

¹⁴⁶ Fromm holds that Aristotelian logic, which is deeply embedded in the thinking of Western science is based on three laws: the law of identity (A is A); the law of contradiction (A is not non-A); and the law of the excluded middle (A cannot be A *and* non-A, neither A *nor* non-A) (Fromm, 1956, p. 67). In Aristotelian logic, the statement that "X is A *and* not A" is nonsensical and a contradiction that is irreconcilable (p. 68). In paradoxical logic on the other hand, which is the predominant mode of thinking in Chinese and Indian philosophy and in the philosophy of Heraclitus, there is harmony in the apparent contradiction between the positing of A and non-A, which can both be considered as predicates of X (p. 68).

“From my own experience I could not convince myself of the primary nature of such a feeling. But this gives me no right to deny that it does in fact occur in other people” (p. 65). Later in that same essay, Freud betrays his disavowal of oneness and makes a connection between that which takes place in the feeling of oneness and that which takes place in the state of love. Freud wrote:

At the height of being in love, the boundary between ego and object threatens to melt away. Against all evidence of his senses a man who is in love declares that ‘I’ and ‘you’ are one and is prepared to behave as if it was a fact (p. 66).

It is arguable, based on the above remarks, that Freud viewed the notion of oneness as a threat to self-other differentiation, which he deemed to be crucial to the development of human selfhood, and crucial to the coherence of his theories of sadomasochism. In Freud’s view, oneness, which is intrinsic to the concept of adult love is rendered as a pathological process where the boundaries of the ego and the external world “become uncertain or...are actually drawn incorrectly”(Freud, 1930/1962a, p. 66). In his closing remarks on oneness and love, Freud situated adult love in the boundless state of primary narcissism that exists prior to the infant’s separation from the mother (p. 66). In the end, Freud reduced love to the world of infantile dependence on internal and external parental objects (pp. 66-67).

Clearly, Fromm’s position of oneness and love is very distinct from Freud’s. Fromm embraced the notion of oneness and viewed it as the core feature to an act of love. Oneness is implied in Fromm’s declaration that, “I love from the

essence of my being —and experience the other person in the essence of his or her being” (Fromm, 1956, p. 52). Whereas Freud implied that the experience of oneness is a threat to one’s identity and treated the experience of oneness with a *hermeneutics of suspicion*, Fromm viewed oneness as a paradoxical process of coming to an awareness of one’s similarity with another as well as one’s differences from another, which are not incompatible processes. According to Fromm, a feature of a productive loving relationship is the willingness to embrace the *paradox* of sameness and difference. His statement, “We are all One— yet every one of us is a unique, unduplicable entity” (p. 52) expresses the intimate connection between sameness and difference that the self experiences in relation to others.

For Fromm, the understanding of sadomasochism cannot be gained through objective knowledge, or by having the right value system, or set of beliefs. Having knowledge of the libido can produce information, but it cannot grant insight concerning the nature of sadomasochism as a way of being-in-the-world. Fromm’s human scientific theory of love offers an articulation of the experience of love which exposes its fallen states of sadomasochistic pseudo-love in a variety of forms. When contrasted with the libido theory, Fromm’s theory of love and sadomasochistic pseudo-love types is neither gendered nor mediated by instinctive aggression. Fromm offers a psychologically accessible explanation of love as oneness with an economical explication of sadomasochistic pseudo-love types (i.e. sexual, non-sexual, social) all organized as various patterns of relatedness that fall short of, or deny the possibility of oneness. As

demonstrated in previous chapters, no other theory of sadomasochism offers an alternative to the libido theory that articulates what constitutes a loving, productive relationship than Fromm's theory of love. Recent psychoanalytic examinations of sadomasochism theories show more and more convergence with Fromm's ideas. It is increasingly agreed upon by current theorists of sadomasochism that the weakness of love as a human commitment is inversely related to excess pleasures derived from human destructiveness (Brenmann, 2003, pp. x-xi). Yet, despite this recognition, it remains unnoticed that no theory has articulated the dimensions of healthy loving relationships and contrasted them with sadomasochism and destructiveness to the extent that Erich Fromm has.

Returning to Freud's bleaker conceptualization of love, one can see how Freud's notion of non-reciprocity anticipated Sartre's (1943/1956) outline of interpersonal love as a nihilistic "fusion of consciousnesses" (p. 489). Sartre characterizes love as an impersonal and tragic affair, one that centers on the impossibility of trying to control how the self is perceived in the eyes of the other. Sartre's references to love take place in the first attitude towards others, that is, in the attitude of "love, language, [and] masochism" (p. 474). According to Sartre, "to love is in essence the project of making oneself loved" (p. 488). Put another way he states, "'love'... is ... a fusion of consciousness in which each of them [i.e., both partners] would preserve his otherness in order to found the other" (p. 489). In Sartre's formularization of love, each person focuses on how the other perceives one's self. The best that can be hoped for is that the other

person will find the subject “as a privileged object” (p. 490). In other words, the person in love is concerned with making oneself desirable in the eyes of the other. According to Sartre’s conceptualization of the masochistic attitude¹⁴⁷ however, the project is hopeless; each person “in love” demands to be the privileged object to the other, thereby evading awareness of one’s own subjectivity. Instead of affirming the vulnerability of one’s subjectivity to the other, each of the lover’s humiliates their own existence by deifying the other and remaining fixed on how the other person sees them. Thus, for Sartre, the project of love is paralyzed by mutually opposing wills trying to remain as a being-for-the-sight-of-others (Gordon, 1995, p.20). Sartre acknowledged that ideal love (i.e., as a reciprocal process), is a “deception” (p. 490) because both lovers are stuck with being “swallowed up in... [the] objectivity” (p. 490) of the other. One can see then, how Sartre’s depiction of love in the masochistic attitude is set up as an irresolvable dilemma (p. 490) of non-reciprocal intentionalities. It becomes another variant of the zero-sum game that is reminiscent of Freud’s non-reciprocal mechanistic explanation of love between the ego-libido and object-libido.

In the sadistic attitude,¹⁴⁸ the project of love is also doomed for Sartre because the subject in the sadistic attitude believes that his or her desire to be loved is unfathomable by the other. No matter how much the other person may desire to be possessed by the subject in the sadistic mode, the sadist wishes the

¹⁴⁷ It will be recalled that Sartre depicted the masochistic attitude as the experience of being an object-for-others, as in the form of a possession. (See chapter 5, section B, p. 168)

¹⁴⁸ It will be recalled that Sartre discussed the sadistic attitude as a blindness where it is imagined that others cannot see the self as a he or she truly is. (See chapter 5, sect.B, p. 169)

other person to be independent of his or her clutches so that real love may be freely offered. One can see that for Sartre, oneness is not an option in either the first or second attitudes of being-for-others. As he stated, “the problem [of love]...remains...without a solution”(p. 488). Love, for Sartre, is “an ideal out of reach. The more I am loved, the more I lose my *being*”(p. 491). As in Freud’s non-reciprocal mechanistic description of ego-love and object love -- where the self turns toward the outside world at the expense of diminishing the love for one’s own self, and vice-versa -- Sartre’s description of interpersonal love similarly negates the possibility of self/other reciprocity. Moreover, any self-realization that comes from the “impulse of love” (p. 491) for Sartre, is experienced by the self ultimately in isolation rather than as a union that is mutually satisfying. As he stated, “the more I am loved, the more I lose my being, the more I am thrown back on my own responsibilities”(p. 491). One is bound to conclude from Sartre’s account of love that he, somewhat like Freud, viewed the notion of interpersonal love as a threat to the self.

The possibility for oneness is not any more hopeful in Sartre’s “We-mode” (Sartre, 1943/1956, pp. 534-556). For Sartre, love in the third attitude of the We-mode is a form of “mob psychology” (p. 546), whereby each subject passively submits to a group “project of love” (p. 546) and sacrifices her/his own individual freedom for the purposes of joining the group. As each individual grows inevitably disappointed by not having achieved the real love promised by the group, each individual member (if they are to remain in the group) turns to

masochism, which is depicted as a collective rush into servitude where everyone “asks to be treated as an object” (p. 546).¹⁴⁹

The existential situation presented by Fromm in his concept of oneness (i.e., love) is very different from Sartre’s existential depiction of love. Whereas for Sartre (1943/1956), love is a contradictory effort conducted by the person to surmount the negation of the self by the other and vice-versa (p. 490), in Fromm’s existential conceptualization of love, the other is not perceived as a threat to the self or as having the power to negate the self. Although Fromm (1939) did not dwell on its philosophical ramifications, he did consider the concept of love for others and the love for one’s self as a contradiction to be an untenable one (p. 513). Whereas for Sartre, the experience of union between the self and another is impossible rendering all love as a form of solipsism; Fromm viewed the experience of oneness on the same psychological plane as existential aloneness, that is as co-existing together. In Fromm’s conceptualization of human existence, aloneness and oneness are intrinsic to the rhythms of life, part of the indivisible connection that each person has to themselves, to other persons, and to the surrounding world of objects. It is not a perfect world, by any means for Fromm, but it is not the world of hopelessness and despair implied by Sartre’s explanation of an ultimately inequitable love (p. 491). I argue here that Fromm’s existential notion of love, which embraces the paradox of separateness and oneness described previously, serves as a counterweight to Sartre’s articulation of love as a doomed conflict. Fromm’s

¹⁴⁹ Sartre’s description of group love is reminiscent of Fromm’s authoritarian mechanism of escape. When one gives up one’s freedom in order to attach to others, sadomasochism ensues. This appears to be what Sartre is describing when explaining love as mob psychology.

existential focus of concern is on the “action of love,” that is, on oneness. The action of love is a choice that leads to enactments of productive love that can be concretely differentiated from enactments that descend into sadomasochistic pseudo-love.

This dissertation started as an examination of the theories of sadomasochism that emerged out of sexology and moved to exploring the topic from an existential psychological perspective. Krafft-Ebing was the first to identify the psychology of sadomasochism though he defined it as two separate sexual perversions according to the biology and physiology of the male and female. Ellis diversified Krafft-Ebing’s strictly morbid psychopathological configuration of sadism and masochism and was the first to consider sadism and masochism as different faces of the same psychological entity, that is, as falling under the rubric of *sadomasochism*. Ellis also challenged the heteronormative construction of sadomasochism that reflected the patriarchal ethos of early psychology, a mindset which has remained surprisingly resilient. Freud launched an elaborate and exhaustive theoretical journey to explain sadomasochism. Freud’s theories privileged the themes of sex, death, and aggression. At the same time, his clinical investigations of sadomasochism opened up the possibility for other theories that de-centered sex, and loosened the strictness of his concepts of death and aggression as the primary causes of sadomasochism. Though the immediate reaction to Freud’s last theorization of sadomasochism, referred to as primary masochism, which he based on the death instinct raised some alternate

theoretical outlooks on sadomasochism, its follow-up has not yielded the broad shift in perspective that might have been expected (Chancer, 1992, p. 88).

At the same time, the existential and existential-phenomenological theories of sadomasochism examined in this text have expanded the discourse of sadomasochism theory outside the bounds of sexuality and other intra-psychic instincts beyond other intellectual traditions of the 20th century. With the arrival of Fromm and Sartre, it was no longer possible to view sadomasochism as a rarely occurring sexual perversion. Instead, with a close reading of their texts, one is led to conclude that existential and existential-phenomenological thought has been pre-eminent in de-centering purely sexualized views of sadomasochism, establishing human relatedness as the core issue behind the vicissitudes of sadomasochism, and responsible for raising the awareness of sadomasochism as an everyday occurrence that is part of being-in-the-world. Following Sartre, the work of Beauvoir and Fanon demonstrated the presence of sadomasochistic social relations in the cultural contexts of gender and race. Beauvoir's analysis of female masochism presented in psychoanalysis demonstrated how the subjectivity of women has been marginalized in sadomasochistic ways in a culture that privileges male subjectivity. Fanon's ontological analysis of blackness exposes the sadomasochistic social structures that are inescapable for the black man in white culture.

As a contemporary extension of Sartre's existential-phenomenological outlook on sadomasochistic relations, Lewis Gordon (2000) takes Sartre's definition of

the “spirit of seriousness”¹⁵⁰ a step further by differentiating between *serious* sadomasochism and *playful* sadomasochism; a notion that helps reinforce the idea that choice and the willingness to question how the self and the other are assessed constitute the central existential themes on the issue of sadomasochism. The “serious sadomasochist” possesses a posture of “bad-faith” (p. 77), which Gordon notes was omitted by Sartre in his explication of sadomasochistic relations (p. 78). According to Gordon, the serious sadist, acting from bad-faith, denies not only others’ points of view, but also the reality that one’s own sadism cannot emerge without the presence of others (p. 77). There is also the serious masochist, who fails to recognize his or her own self-agency being enacted via the attempt to fix the sadist’s vision on him or herself as an object (p. 77). In both cases, the serious sadomasochist assumes others and/or the material world to be the “cause” of their sadomasochism (p. 75). A good example of a serious sadist is the religious terrorist who takes the position that he or she has no choice but to attack the enemy because it is “God’s plan.” For the terrorist/sadist, there is no schism between choice and option.¹⁵¹ He or she situates himself or herself on the level of God and becomes the view of God as if they themselves are God. As Gordon points out however, the best the sadist can do is to “*play* God, but the sadist cannot *be* God. According to Gordon, the

¹⁵⁰ See chapter 5 section D, pp. 192-195

¹⁵¹ Gordon (2000) differentiates between “choosing” and having options, which are not identical. One is always able to choose even in the face of not having options that can transform the material conditions imposed upon the situation. For Gordon, theories (or acts) that fail to make the distinction between choice and options carry the danger of using gods (i.e., absolutist ideas) as the model for human choice, thereby dictating what will be (p. 76)

sadist stops playing God once he or she assumes to be on the level of God, which is an obvious lie that is a form of bad faith (p. 77).¹⁵²

On the other hand, there is the “playful sadist,” who according to Gordon, recognizes the condition of his or her freedom by embracing the idea that one “chooses the rules of the game [as to] what constitutes reality (p. 76). As Gordon sees it, one can participate in sadistic sexual play, for example, without being in bad faith. When the erotic charge emerges for the sake of playing, the conditions of one’s freedom are affirmed along with an awareness that one’s role is not absolute. For Gordon, playful sadomasochism is possible whenever roles are experienced as un-fixed and contingent on one’s individual sense of agency to shift the rules of the game. As soon as roles become embedded in the “reality of the situation,” playfulness is suspended and the return of bad faith, which denies that roles are co-constituted by the sadist and the masochist takes over. While Fromm never discussed sadomasochism in terms of its playful and serious forms, he did privilege the themes of choice and the primacy of human sociality in his theory of love. Fromm’s theory of love and his analysis of sadomasochistic pseudo-love forms is consistent with Gordon’s assumptions concerning serious and playful sadomasochism.

Fromm stood at the crossroads where psychoanalytic thought intersected with the ideas that choice and sociality were at the heart of human existence. Fromm was an outspoken analyst who reflected deeply on the philosophical and social

¹⁵² It is interesting to note that both Gordon (2003) and Fromm (1956) stress the existential situation posed by God and “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” in the story of Adam and Eve. Both existentialists also emphasize the freedom to disobey as intrinsic to the construction of good and evil and that the anguish over having to choose is not ameliorated by the presence of God (See Fromm, 1956, pp. 8-9; also see Gordon, 2003, pp. 46-47 & 123-124).

ideas embedded in the clinical thinking prevalent during his time. He placed an emphasis on how clinical thought related to social processes. Fromm concentrated on the dialectical relationship between individual character formation and social ideology. He did not emphasize innate character traits that develop as a result of fixations at various psychosexual stages. His examination of the sadomasochistic (authoritarian) character advanced the understanding of character from a psychoanalytic perspective that remains a significant contribution. Rather than being a departure from psychoanalytic theory, Fromm's work on the social dimensions of sadomasochism was an important psychoanalytic insight that recognized human sociality (i.e., the primary need for relatedness) as a precondition to the formation of individual character. In contrast to other contemporaneous psychoanalytic views which held a fixed view of character development based on infantile psychosexual development, Fromm emphasized the malleability of character development throughout the life span. Fromm should be remembered as the first analyst to conceptualize sadomasochistic enactments and serious acts of destruction as distinctly human phenomena arising from the inability to overcome the experience of separateness (existential aloneness) from other human beings while embracing the primary need for relatedness.

A review of contemporary psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism shows that current analysts are taking a more relational approach that include conceptualizations of love and erotic desire. It is also clear that the importance of self-love and the ability to love others as a deterrent to sadomasochistic

indulgences can be recognized as central to the problem of destructiveness (De Masi, 2003, p. 142). Furthermore, there is a greater emphasis in current psychoanalytic theories of sadomasochism on questions of personal responsibility and the assumption of an innate sense of good and evil as intrinsic to each person (De Masi, 2003, p. 144). More than a half-century ago, Fromm's writings in "Selfishness and Self-Love" (1939), *Escape from freedom* (1941), and *The art of loving* (1956) anticipated these current findings as discussed in chapters 4 and 5.¹⁵³ Yet, as has been demonstrated in this dissertation, Fromm's work has been undersold as a contribution to the history of sadomasochism theory. Franco De Masi's recent psychoanalytic examination of sadomasochism in *The sadomasochistic perversion: The entity and the theories* (De Masi, 2003) is a good example. De Masi is a psychoanalyst who vigorously challenges psychoanalytic theories of a sexual basis of sadomasochism with a metaphorical framework he refers to as a "sadomasochistic monad" theory (p. 4).¹⁵⁴ He organizes sadomasochism theories into three paradigms (p. 47). The first paradigm emphasizes theories that favor a sexual disturbance as a cause of sadomasochism. The second paradigm comprises the relational theories that help to explain sadomasochism. In the second group, the focus is on anxiety as a threat to personal identity and sexuality as a defensive reaction to narcissistic

¹⁵³ As mentioned earlier, Fromm (1964) articulated an innate striving towards growth within each person referred to as the "syndrome of growth" that co-exists with life-thwarting strivings called the "syndrome of decay" (p. 13). De Masi (2003) points out that Klein's ideas confirms that an intuitive basis of natural morality exists within each individual (p. 143), a concept which is reminiscent of Fromm's syndrome of growth.

¹⁵⁴ De Masi (2003) coined the term "sadomasochistic monad" to introduce the idea of an isolated fantasy world of a certain kind of destructive pleasure that occurs in a single compulsive act. For De Masi, sadomasochistic monad refers to the sexualization of destructive pleasure but does not rule out other kinds of pleasure that may be "connected with the traumatic unpleasure of past negative experiences" (p. 4).

wounds, which are both considered central themes in relational theories. The third paradigm is derived from Klein's psychobiological theory of sadomasochism and stresses the triumphant experience of power and sexualized cruelty as the nexus of sadomasochistic pleasure.

De Masi's review of sadomasochism theories demonstrates that current psychoanalytic understanding of sadomasochism has gone beyond a strict libidinal theory, especially the second paradigm of relational theories.

Throughout all of his explorations on sadomasochism, it is striking that De Masi does not make any reference to Fromm's writings on destructiveness, love, or sadomasochistic pseudo-love. Herein lies a stark example of how Fromm continues to be dismissed from current psychoanalytic discourse on sadomasochism theory. This dissertation therefore serves as a recuperative effort to re-inscribe Erich Fromm's theory of love and sadomasochistic pseudo-love within the history of psychoanalytic thought concerning sadomasochism theory.

It is important to speculate as to why Fromm's work has been undervalued in current psychoanalytic and other post-modern theories on sadomasochism. One likely reason is that Fromm incorporated spiritual ideas from outside the realm of conventional science and translated them into secular psychological principles. Fromm's re-constitution of the Christian New Testament passage "Love thy neighbor as thyself," which he uses to distinguish narcissism from authentic self-love and love for others, is a good example. Fromm was open to allowing insights from many of the world's great spiritual practices to inform his theories.

Fromm's use of paradoxical logic from Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Sufism formed an explicit theme in his theory of love and self-love as oneness. He incorporated these influences in his theories during a time when having a valid theory meant that one had to be scientifically "objective."

Another factor that may inhibit a wider reception of Fromm's theories on sadomasochism by current psychoanalysts may have come from his refusal to yield to the modern angst over the erotic nature of love. While Fromm did not deny the importance of erotic love, he refrained from over-determining the role that the erotic plays in acts of submission and domination, sexual or otherwise. Consequently, Fromm is often accused of ignoring the erotic in his theorizations of sadomasochistic attachments as is captured by Jessica Benjamin's brief critique of Fromm found in *The bonds of love* (Benjamin, 1988, p. 246).

Benjamin (1988), a feminist psychoanalyst, states that "Erich Fromm developed the idea of the search for the 'magic helper' in *Escape from freedom*. Fromm's emphasis on the avoidance of anxiety rather than on instinct, while useful, lost sight of the erotic nature of submission"(p. 246). The "magic helper" is defined by Fromm in *Escape from freedom* (1941) as a "person or power on whom [one] is dependent...[and whose] essential quality is to protect, help, and develop the individual, to be with him [or her] and never leave him [or her] alone" (pp. 172-173). If one cares to look a bit more closely however, Fromm did, in fact, stress the importance of the erotic in the attachment to a magic helper such as a teacher, a therapist, a husband, a wife, or other authority figures as the

following passage will demonstrate. In explaining some of the reasons that a person may become attached to a magic helper, Fromm (1941) wrote:

A person with that kind of relatedness to the magic helper seeks to find him in the flesh and blood. For some reason or other— often supported by sexual desires— a certain other person assumes for him those magic qualities, and he makes that person into the being to whom and on whom his whole life becomes related and dependent. (p. 173)

One can see in the above account that Fromm is describing what could be called an erotic transference. I argue that Fromm is wrongly accused and did, in fact, account for the role that erotic passion played in strong intimate attachments, although he may not have stressed it to the extent that others did. At the same time, he asserted that erotic desires should not be the exclusive focus of sadomasochistic acts and other acts of destructiveness that exalt power. I argue that the perception that Fromm ignored the importance of sexuality remains a popular misconception which is not borne out from a closer examination of his writings.

Fromm viewed sexual pleasure as an act of spontaneous joy, which can spring from a desire for erotic love and an exclusive aim to unite with another person as an expression of oneness. He viewed sexuality from the perspective of “abundance,” which meant that sexuality is one of a multitude of human desires that seeks fulfillment and which can be blended with the idea of human love. Fromm’s conceptualization of sexuality as abundance was at odds with Freud’s modernist notion of sex, which can be described as a psychology of

want, or as Fromm liked to describe it, as derived from “a concept of scarcity” (Fromm, 1969/1970, p. 46). The view of sex as a scarce entity is at the heart of Fromm’s rejection of Freud’s reductionist view of the sexual libido. Although Fromm’s theory of sexuality was admittedly heteronormative, as can be expected, given its time frame, I argue that his view of sex based on the notion of abundance helped to *humanize* sexuality rather than de-emphasize or privilege sex as an instinctive drive. Yet, like many of Fromm’s ideas, his ideas on sexuality are undersold, particularly by current theorists of sadomasochism.

As I have argued throughout this dissertation, Erich Fromm’s value as a theorist of sadomasochism should be reconsidered. To summarize his contributions, one can point to three significant reasons that warrant a better reception of Fromm’s work by more current theorists of sadomasochism. First, there is the fact that Fromm was the first psychoanalytically informed theorist of sadomasochism to infer that the understanding of sadomasochism is beyond natural science theories which deny the primacy of human sociality and rely on theoretical constructs that privilege sexuality. Second, it was Fromm who first articulated that the inability to love, the disavowal of personal responsibility within relationships, and the internal distorted sense of right and wrong, are central matters regarding sadomasochism. Third, Fromm’s theory of love, despite its limitations, offers a robust and grounded human conceptual framework of sadomasochism that can serve as an antidote to sadomasochism. It is Fromm’s emphasis on the paradox of separateness and oneness as basic to the formation of loving productive relationships that continues to offer a counterweight theory

which is psychoanalytically informed and affords insight into the formation of pleasures that exalt power. Fromm's examination of the sadomasochistic (authoritarian) character, self-hatred and destructiveness, and his call for a theory of love that accompanied an analysis of sadomasochistic pseudo-love took place over a half century ago. Today, his perspective remains vital and is convergent with current views of sadomasochism theorists and should therefore be included in the history of sadomasochism theory.

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